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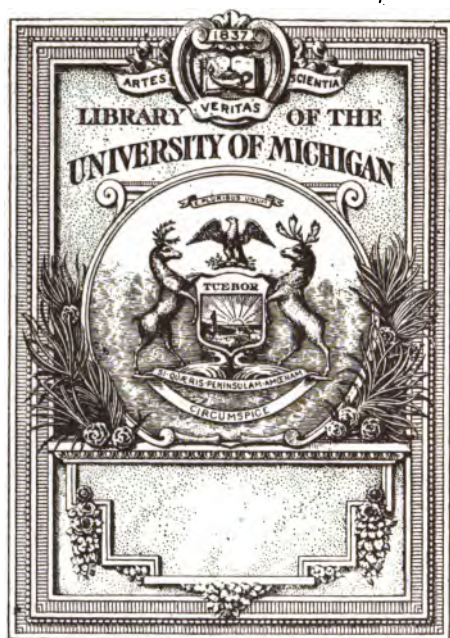
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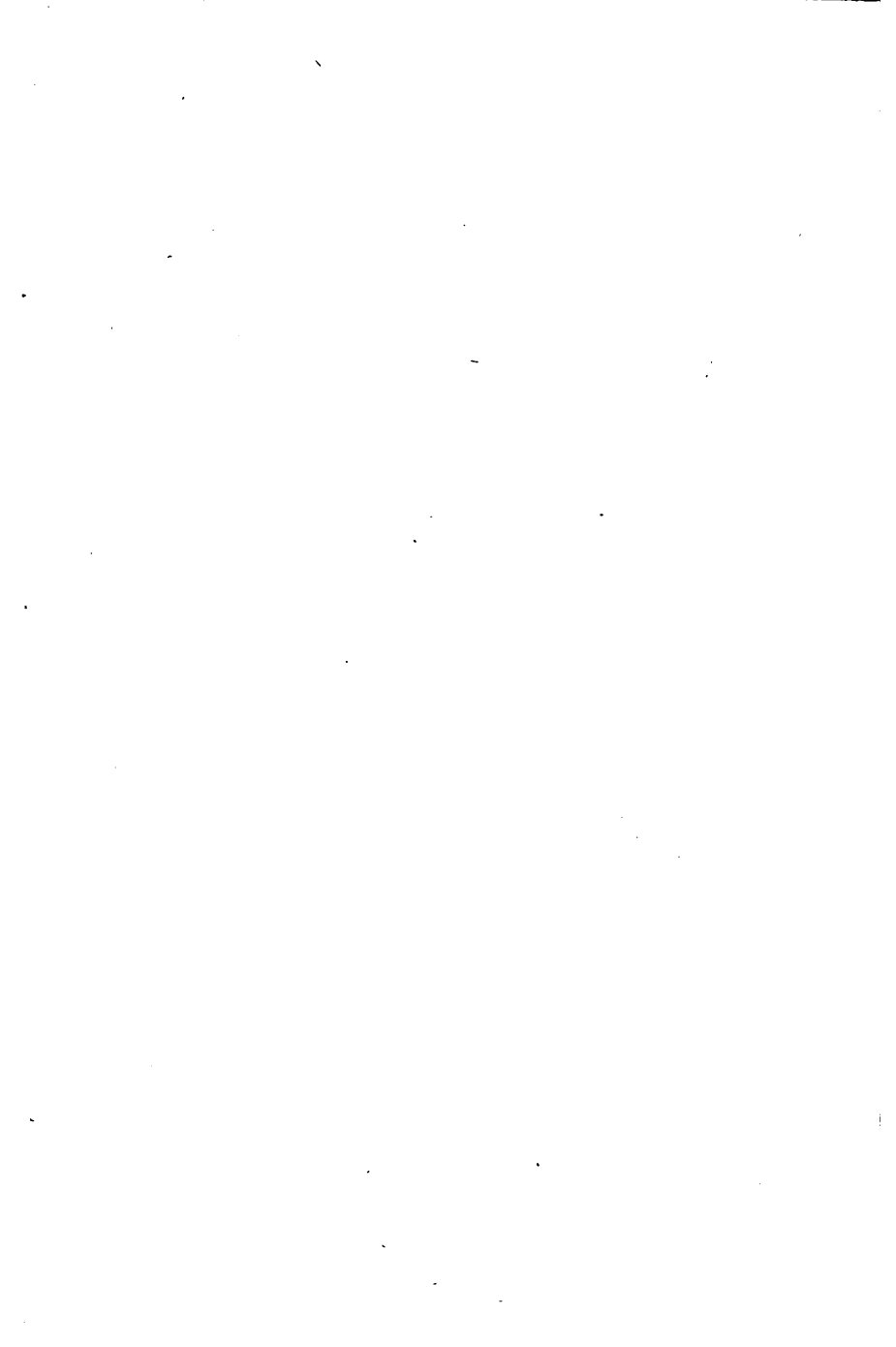


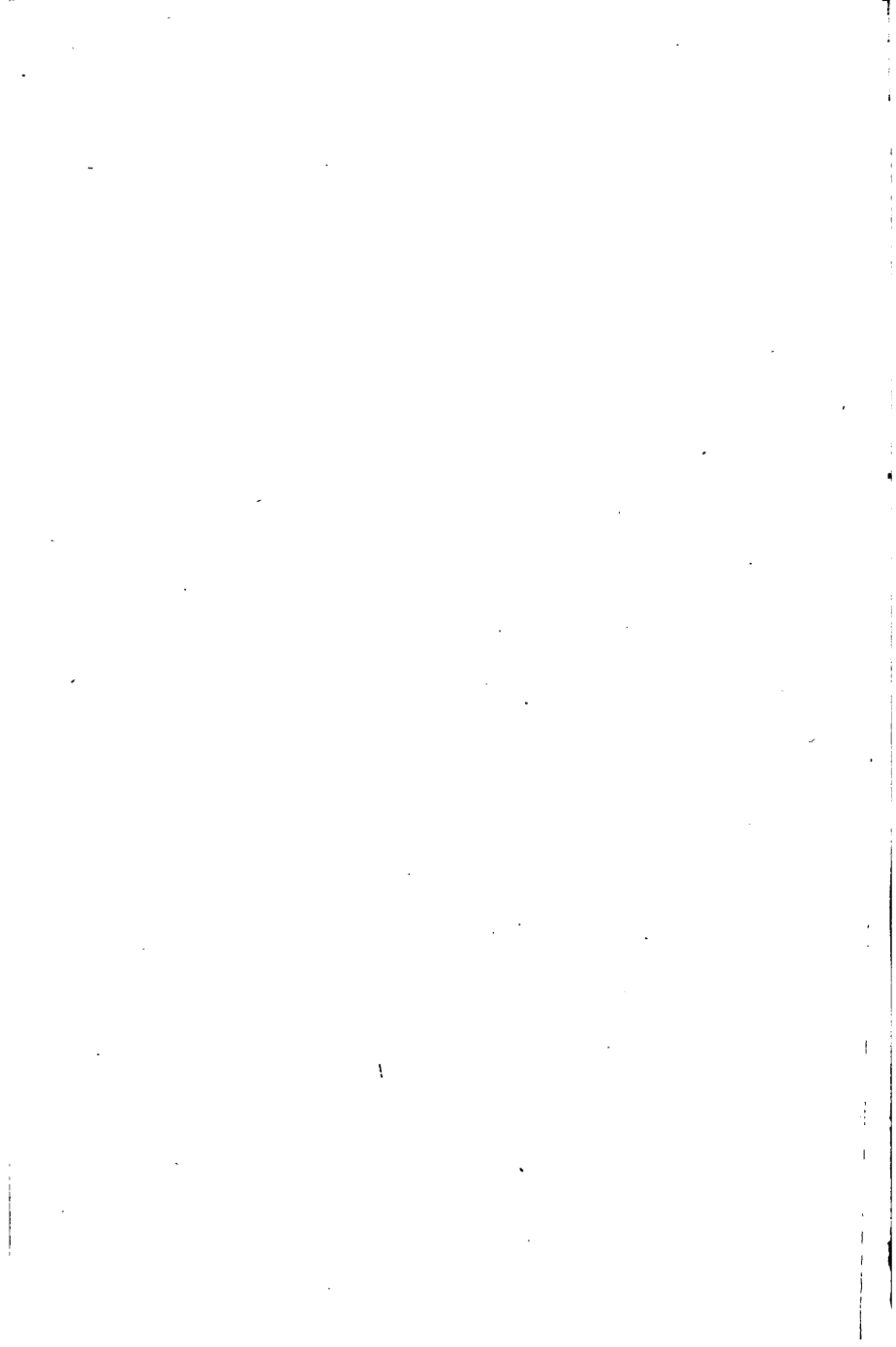
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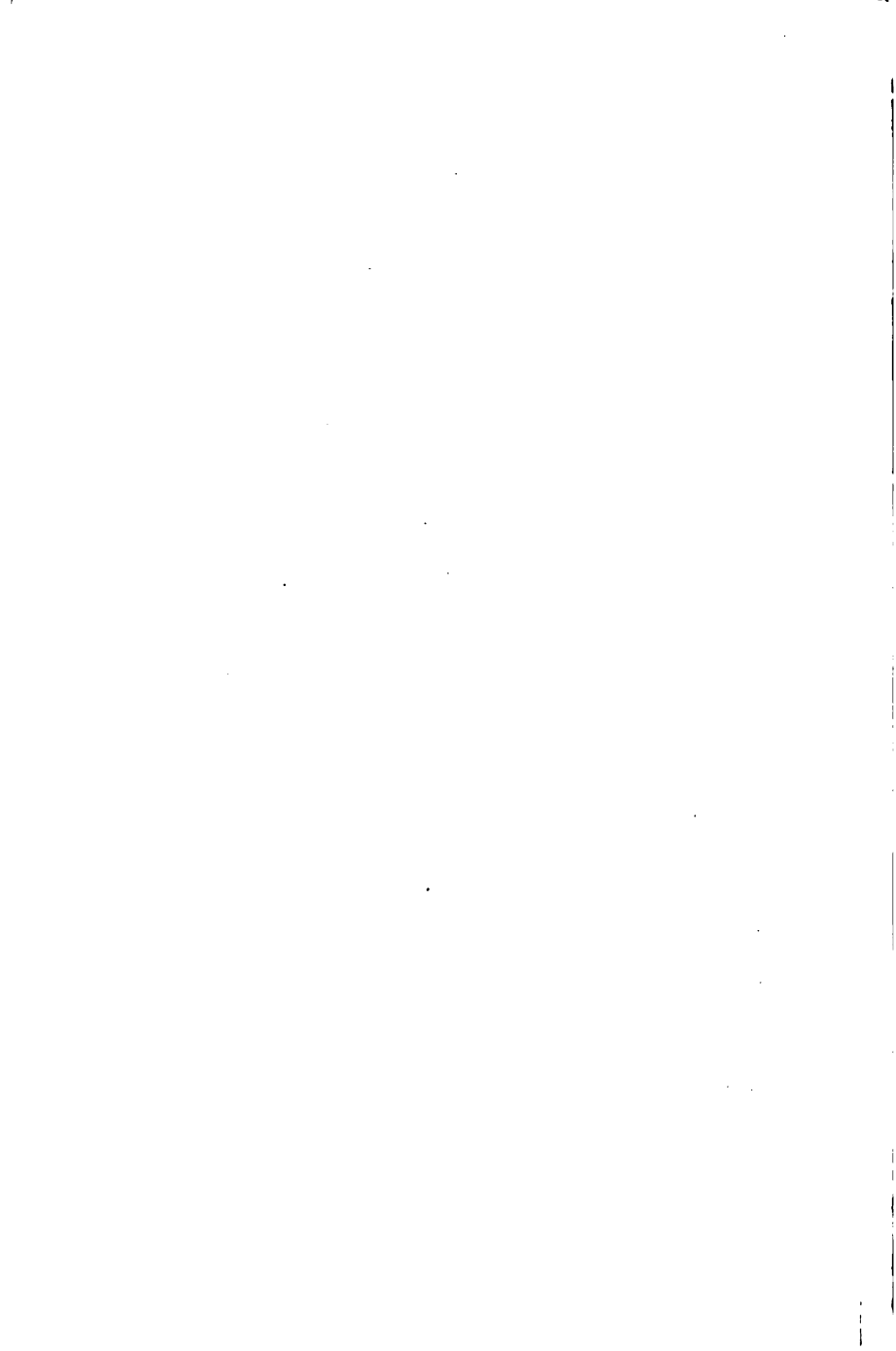
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THE SPHINX'S LAWYER



THE SPHINX'S LAWYER

BY
FRANK DANBY

AUTHOR OF
"PIGS IN CLOVER," "BACCARAT," ETC.



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*Wer nie sein Brot mit Thränen ass,
Wer nie die kummervollen Nächte
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass,
Der kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen Mächte!*

*Ihr führt in's Leben uns hinein,
Ihr lasst den Armen schuldig werden,
Dann überlasst ihr ihn der Pein,
Denn alle Schuld rächt sich auf Erden.*



TO
MY BROTHER
"OWEN HALL"

BECAUSE you "hate and loathe" my book and its subject, I dedicate it to you. For, incidentally, your harsh criticism has intensified my conviction of the righteousness of the cause I plead, and revolt from your narrow judgment has strengthened me against any personal opprobrium that such pleading may bring upon me. I have heard all your argument; I know where I stand. It is at the foot of the Throne of Mercy, with my client by my side, the client of the Sphinx's Lawyer. You, as well as I, know what he was in his brilliant youth; you, no less than I, know how weak he was in his strength, of what flawed physique and untoward inheritance. *Pity* was the one unsounded note in the chorus of execration that followed this poor leper to the grave, and beyond it; to awaken pity I have written. For was it not pitiful to see that fine brain set in that unstable body?

What I have written of him whom I have called Algernon Heseltine, I have written in all sincerity, and from deep conviction. I have no serious fear of being misjudged, although you, who have always been so generous in your estimate of my small talent, and appreciative beyond my deserts, now warn me that my hatred of cruelty will be misinterpreted for sympathy with the crime, instead of with the agony, of him who suffered.

Algernon Heseltine is the one figure in my book drawn from life. The woman I have placed by his side is one whom fiction and not fact assigned to this sad post; his friends and his disciples are fancy pictures, not attempted portraits. And the scenes in which they act are invented scenes, not remembered ones. Save for Algernon Heseltine, the book is all imaginative.

Knowing this, all the violence of your antipathy converges to one point, and can be summed up in a sentence. You assert—asseverate is, perhaps, the better word—that such a career as I have indicated is outside the region of art. I join issue with you here, and leave the public to arbitrate between us.

THE SPHINX'S LAWYER

CHAPTER I

" 149 PRINCE'S GATE.

" DEAR MRS. HESELTINE,—

" You have spoken several times to me of your friend, Mr. Welch-Kennard; you will remember I sat next to him the night of your supper-party at the Carlton. Do you know if he is a good lawyer? I am not mistaken in thinking you told me he *was* a lawyer, am I?

" I find it difficult to get over the loss of my husband. Of course, these are early days, but I feel so bewildered, so at sea, without him. My cousin, Fred Darcy, has been helping me, but now he thinks I ought to have my own 'adviser.' Fred acts for Darcy Bros., and it seems there is some doubt as to the value of my interest in the business. It is all very complicated and worrying, and I'm terribly ignorant about such matters. Poor Norman has left everything to me, and I am his sole executrix. So, if Mr. Welch-Kennard is a lawyer, and is clever, will you send me his address *at once*?

" Yours, in great haste,

" BERENICE DARCY."

"MY DEAR,—

"I am so sorry you are in trouble. And yet I envy you. For you are going to have Errington Welch-Kennard to help you, and that is sufficient to turn trouble into pleasure. I won't rave about him; I'll leave you to find him out for yourself. I have raved about him to you once or twice, though, haven't I? Well! he is a thousand times more than I have told you. Clever, kind, a splendid friend, quite different in his 'frock-coat and high-hat' office manner from what he was at the Carlton, but unique always. The address is 138 Southampton Street; I have written to him for you. How wise of you to think of sending for him. Young, beautiful, £8000 a year, *and* Kennard! Oh! my dear, what a lucky woman you are. Come and see me soon, and tell me all about it. I shall be dying to hear.

"Why do you call me 'Mrs. Heseltine' by the way? Nobody else does. My friends, and I had begun to count you amongst them, call me 'Sybil.' To Errington, and to my intimates, I am the 'Sphinx.' But do not think from that, that I am not proud of my name. Here, I write it for you:

"SYBIL ALGERNON HESELTINE."

She could not trust her letters to the post. But then, Sybil Heseltine was always impulsive; she was hardly less so now than in her youth. She wrote her other letter in an incoherent hurry, and despatched them both by cab. If Mr. Welch-Kennard was not at the address to which she sent it, the cabman was to try—she mentioned two clubs, and a set of chambers. He must find him, he must bring back an answer.

Sybil's imagination carried her a long way, after she had had Berenice Darcy's note; but then, the road was already familiar.

This is what she wrote to the lawyer:

"HANS CRESCENT.

"DEAR 'BRIGHAM,'—

"You've had another success! The original Brigham wasn't in it with you. Mrs. Norman Darcy has just written me for your address! *Do*, do everything you can for her. She was the red-haired woman in a green frock who sat next to you at supper the first night of *Richard II*. I know you said you did not admire her, but, if you were not as untruthful as I suspected, you were quite wrong. She was smitten with you, of course. She told me the next day that she liked the way your mouth turned up, instead of down, at the corners, and the shape of your head. I never told her you said she was like an unfinished sketch for a skeleton, by Rossetti! My brigade think her dark eyes go awfully well with her red hair. And you admitted she might fill out. Anyway, her husband has died suddenly, and left her trustee or executrix, or something, to his will; she is awfully rich. I know you are made for each other, as solicitor and client, of course, I mean. Isn't it unselfish of me to want to give you to her? But Apollo has been so sweet lately. Come and tell me all about everything, directly it happens, or before!

"Yours, as always,

"SYBIL."

" PARK PLACE,
" ST. JAMES'S.

" DEAR, BUT INSCRUTABLE, SPHINX,—

" I am, as always, completely at your service. I shall be charmed to help your friend, although I did not quite like the colour of her hair.

" *À beau jour, beau retour.* You must gently asphyxiate, or find some other means of getting rid of, Frank Dickinson; his moustache is too small for him, he has outgrown it perhaps. Anyway, it has got on my nerves.

" About your unselfishness. *Amor a nullo amato amor perdona.* Hyperion also should be gently diplomatised into absenting himself this afternoon. I am coming to see you after I have been to Prince's Gate. I am off there now. Her letter arrived with yours.

" Your slave,
" E. W.-K."

It was many weeks since Norman Darcy had died, but a funereal air still hung about the Prince's Gate house. The solemn butler, who opened the door in a quiet, almost surreptitious, manner, was the janitor of a square and gloomy hall. After he had scrutinised Mr. Welch-Kennard's professional card:

MR. WELCH-KENNARD

MESSRS. KENNARD AND CARKER,
138 Southampton Street, Strand.

he admitted, somewhat reluctantly, that Mrs. Darcy was at home.

The library opened direct from the dingy hall, but, quickly as Welch-Kennard followed his name into the

room, he had received a distinct impression of its furnishment. He was sorry for his new client before he had heard her troubles. To live among such surroundings, to enter her home through such a hall, must be an appalling experience for such a woman as he recollected seeing at the Carlton supper-party. It had a marbled paper, and the whole of one side of the wall was taken up by a huge oil painting by Landseer, representing a kilted Scotsman with a hound at his feet, holding up some dead birds. There was a marble bust, probably of some defunct Darcy, in the further corner. Other game-pieces were on the walls. That was all he had seen before he found himself in the room, shaking hands with his new client; but that had been enough.

She rose from the table to greet him; she had been listening to the two elderly men, who retained their seats, and the younger, slighter man, who stood on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire. Papers and black bags littered the harshness of the red-jute Victorian tablecloth. The room was large, modern, prosaic, heavy with mahogany furniture, commonplace with Turkey carpet and unpictorial family portraits. The first thought that struck him was how right his impression of the hall had been. Berenice Darcy was as absurdly incongruous there as a Corot would have been hanging above the Landseer. She was not tall; her beauty was rather that of colouring than features. Welch-Kennard had thought her strangely attractive in her green evening-dress that night at the Carlton, with her exquisitely transparent skin, bright eyes, and red, soft lips. Her widow's cap, and narrow collar, her *crêpe* and mourning garb, had not subdued her special attraction. He shook hands with her, saying a few appropriate, well-chosen

words, which she acknowledged less aptly. After his brief introduction to the others, they plunged at once into the business of the hour.

Norman Darcy, after a lifetime of semi-invalidism, had died suddenly, leaving his affairs comparatively in disorder. The two elderly men at the table had been his business partners; the stiff and obvious Oxonian near the fire, wearing glasses, young, but with nothing fresh or youthful about him, was Fred Darcy, cousin to Berenice's late husband, a lawyer too, and at the moment dominating the situation, such as it was. Welch-Kennard grasped all this quickly, dissociating Mrs. Darcy from her surroundings. She was too attractive for the position in which she found herself, that was obvious; but she was interested in it, she was young enough to find any novelty, even widowhood, interesting. What *he* was doing in this *galère* was another matter. Before he arrived, it had seemed to him that this was one of the Sphinx's subtle jokes. Being there, however, he intended to see the adventure through, if indeed it should prove to be an adventure, as he began to hope.

"Will you put Mr. Welch-Kennard in possession of all the facts? Will you tell him about everything, and why you thought I must have my own lawyer?" she asked Fred, a little shyly. She felt the position to be strange. It was Errington Welch-Kennard who made it appear so. If he felt her incongruity, she felt his no less acutely. She remembered that which she had forgotten, put aside, during Norman's brief death struggle, and since his death. She remembered the drive home from the Carlton, after the supper-party, and many of the things this man had said to her. Her colour flushed suddenly, whilst Fred was making his dry, busi-

ness statement. Errington wondered at it, he could not trace that sudden flush.

Fred Darcy, at Berenice's request, stated the position, none too briefly. It was evident he considered himself one of its chief features. His cousin's will had been drawn up some few years ago, before he, Fred Darcy, was in a position to advise him. But he was solicitor to Messrs. Darcy Bros., and, as it appeared to him, on perusing the will, and realising its provisions, that the interests of Mrs. Norman Darcy and those of Messrs. Darcy Bros. might not prove identical, he had thought it better that she should have her own representative. There was a happy mixture of priggishness and authority in his address. Errington Welch-Kennard, who was a man of many worlds, decided that Fred must have been a scholar of his college, probably a gold-medallist, the finished product of the examination boards. He was evidently proud of his integrity, and his disinterestedness in giving such advice.

"Decidedly," commented Welch-Kennard, airily—he had not begun to take Fred, or the position, seriously—"Decidedly, it is better for all parties that interests not identical should be safeguarded antagonistically."

Fred looked at him combatively; the syllogism hardly met the point, and he would have liked to argue its form, but the occasion was inauspicious. After a short pause, he went on.

It appeared that the partnership deed was an old one; it had been drawn up nearly thirty years ago, and various unanticipated, trade and family, complications had made the provisions debatable, if not inoperative. Fred said that, since the affairs had come into his hands, he had repeatedly mentioned the matter to every member

of the firm, separately or together; but Norman Darcy's health, and the delicacy and consideration of his partners, had constantly postponed action. Now they were confronted with this situation, which Fred Darcy continued to explain more or less lucidly.

Berenice was but vaguely interested in this dull business talk; Fred had said it all to her before, and it seemed merely the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. Before she had written to Sybil Heseltine for his address, and many times since, she had wondered how Mr. Welch-Kennard would present himself to her in the light of a sober business day.

His image, notwithstanding the many times Sybil had spoken of him, had grown dim through the troubles that sprang up to meet her immediately after the supper-party; but gradually it had been reviving. Had her motive been mixed, in assenting so readily to Fred's suggestion that she should have her own lawyer?

Now he was here, she knew he filled the foreground. Yet the sobriety of his aspect, of his few crisp, interjected sentences, contrasted strangely with the brilliant personality which had magnetised her for one curious hour amid the electric lights and gaiety of the Carlton supper-party. The instinctive insincerity of their mutual attraction had expended itself in their admissions to their mutual friend. He had admired her; and denied it. She had known both his address, and his profession, she had looked up both in the post office directory. Errington Welch-Kennard was not a common name; there was no difficulty in identifying both him and his firm. Her letter to Sybil had been disingenuous, and she had no excuse for her want of candour.

At the Carlton, in evening-dress, he had simply been

an unusually handsome man of about thirty-five, tall, clean-shaven, looking like a barrister. Of course, she had noted the upward curve at the corners of his lips, and the sweetness of his smile, his fine profile, with the sweep of the hair behind the delicate ears that lay so flat against his head, the grey-green depths in his luminous eyes, the grace of his movements.

But it was Fred who had insisted that she must send for a lawyer within a month after Norman's death; she disowned the responsibility of it to herself with a certain little thrill and misgiving, as she watched Welch-Kennard.

Whilst Fred continued to expound her affairs, she remembered, also, that her new lawyer's reputation had preceded their introduction. Sybil had told her that he had been the lover of many women. His sensitiveness to sex influence, to which she had vaguely listened, but which she could note, should have repelled her sympathies. Yet, he had differed in many ways from her preconceived notions, and her outlook had certainly broadened since she had known Sybil Heseltine.

Many times since that evening she had found herself thinking of him; he had even intruded into her dreams. She had wished, at the Carlton, that he had been less talkative, less the animated centre of the party, and given her greater opportunity to trace the psychology of him. But this afternoon she wished, quite definitely, that he would talk, would take the ball from Fred, would make himself felt; she tried to force him to do so, interrupted to put a question to him, appealed to him to enlighten her on this or the other point. But he, as it were, referred her to Fred, and Fred's lucidity made it impossible for her not to understand.

The matter seemed quite simple. The books of the business must be entered to date, examined, the probate and estate dues satisfied, certain papers filled up, oaths administered and declarations filed; all this was almost mechanical. The question was, as the sole beneficiary under her husband's will, his sole executrix and administratrix, to what share in the business that bore his name, its profits or liabilities, was she entitled?

It was only when the dusk of the winter day had begun to deepen into twilight that the growing desire to hear the other speak, the wish to stay Fred's monotonous periods, hurried her into error. She put a slender hand on Welch-Kennard's coat-sleeve.

"Is it all clear to you? Can you, will you, act for me?"

He turned to her quickly. The curious attraction about the man was, after all, as obvious to her to-day as it had been at the Carlton. That he was conscious of her, too, not as a client, but as a woman, was evident in the light that gleamed in his eyes as they met hers, in the inflection of his voice as he answered. He touched, one had almost said, he patted, the hand that rested on his arm. But the gesture, protective, reassuring, was still part of the discreet professional manner that he had assumed with the decorous frock-coat and grey gloves.

"Certainly, make your mind perfectly easy; I will act for you, *with you*." The last two words were low, for her ear alone.

It was extraordinary how little he said, yet how deep the undercurrent seemed to be of the wave of mutual understanding that swept over her when he spoke, when he looked at her. Had she been wrong in sending for

him? But it was necessary for her to have a lawyer, even Fred himself had said that. Then, why not one who interested her? She thought of Sybil's aphorism, that all women of the middle classes were in love with their clergymen or doctors; and she wondered why not with their lawyers also. She listened as Kennard addressed the little meeting. She need have had no fear that the others would find her selection of a legal adviser strange, unusual. It was only she who saw him otherwise than completely grave, and much impressed by the matter in hand.

He began by thanking Fred Darcy for his statement, with an appreciative word as to its manner. Then he added, with a courteous but perfectly dignified appeal for their consideration:

"The facts are all new to me, gentlemen. I shall ask you for a short time in which to consider the case. If you will leave these papers in my possession until to-morrow, and then do me the honour of meeting me again, either here or at my office, I hope to be in the position to make a suggestion to you that will prove acceptable. A short conference with my client"—he turned to her, and now there was not a shade in his face, nor a tone in his voice, that they might not all see and hear—"if she will spare me half an hour, will assist me considerably."

She inclined her head, in acceptance of the suggestion; the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with him brought again that curious little thrill.

"May I take it, then, that this suits us all; to-morrow, at the same hour?"

Finally, after the slightest possible consultation, it was decided that they should meet again in Prince's

Gate, to hear what Mr. Welch-Kennard would suggest.

Practically this dismissed Fred and the partners. Although tea, and whisky and soda, a certain bustle and delay of gathering together papers, and hats, and coats, filled another quarter of an hour, the meeting was over.

Nobody was antipathetic to Norman Darcy's widow, or her interests; both partners were rich men. Each of them, as he said good-bye, tried to convey his feelings in kindly awkwardness. Fred Darcy would have lingered. He seemed to expect Mr. Welch-Kennard to press him to remain and assist; but Kennard made it obvious by his immobility that he had no such intention. Finally, therefore, Fred also, somewhat awkwardly, withdrew.

The door was hardly closed, the echo of the footsteps, and the sound of voices, were still in the hall, when Welch-Kennard discarded what Sybil called his "six-and-eightpenny manner," and, with his eyes and face alight, became the Welch-Kennard of the many adventures. He sprang from his seat, and went over to his new client.

"You dear little woman, you dear unconventional little woman," he began impulsively. "How sweet of you it was to send for me. I longed to come, I wanted to fly to you the moment I heard you were in trouble."

Her colour deepened a little, she got up nervously from her chair, she was suddenly shy.

"It is good to have got rid of them, isn't it? good to be without the chaperonage of those three lugubrious frock-coats."

She really was only a girl, her four-and-twenty years; three of them passed as Norman Darcy's wife, had not

even taught her self-possession. Welch-Kennard was exhilarated by her obvious embarrassment.

"So you had not forgotten that evening at the Carlton! I wonder if you would care to hear how much I have thought about it, how often I have thought about it. I haunted Sybil just to hear her talk of you. You know," he went on, "you know that that one meeting is no gauge of our intimacy. The Sphinx has talked about you to me by the hour together."

"Oh! Sybil! Sybil is an enthusiast." She moved away from him, then restlessly toward the window. "I wonder whether they got wet," she said irrelevantly, "it has just begun to rain."

He followed her, dismissing the weather easily.

"I rivalled her immediately in this one of her enthusiasms. You knew that didn't you? Don't tell me we did not begin to understand each other that wonderful evening. Isn't that why you let me see you home? What an absurdly short drive it was! Isn't that why you have sent for me? I like that pink flush with your Venetian hair."

She had turned hastily toward him, as if to deny that it was the reason she had sent for him.

"What a wonderful complexion you have. Did ever any one tell you so before?—But, of course, they have——"

"No, no one has ever taken the liberty of discussing my personal appearance with me," she said, hurriedly, with an unsuccessful attempt at dignity of bearing. "I am sure only one of Sybil's friends would have thought of doing so. Presently you will be congratulating me on the becomingness of my widow's cap."

She laughed rather unsteadily.

"I sent for you because Fred, Mr. Darcy, thought I ought to have my own lawyer. Please go back to your legal manner, I—I like it better, it is more appropriate. Talk of my affairs, not of me. What do you want to ask me about? You said you wanted half an hour with me, alone."

"Of course." He was quite prompt. "I have wanted an hour alone with you ever since we first met. Didn't you realise that, when you wouldn't let me come in that evening, when you 'door-stepped' me so coolly? I have a thousand things to ask and tell you. But first, are you very intimate with that young lawyer-cousin of yours—from Balliol, isn't he? He has the peculiar Balliol vanity, and accent. Do you like him, trust him?"

"Both," she answered quickly, glad to be, as she thought, on safe ground. "It is not because I do not trust Fred Darcy completely that I wanted a lawyer of my own. It was his suggestion, not mine. He was my husband's best, and our most intimate, friend."

"I am not talking of friendship, nor in the plural. He is in love with you, of course; that is easily seen. And you? How about you?"

Again she flushed that colour he had admired. It was, perhaps, not new to her that Fred admired her; but, neither during her husband's lifetime, nor in the few short weeks since his death, had he told her so. All the Darcys were men of honour. They were not brilliant, nor magnetic, like this strange friend of Sybil Heseltine's, but—they were men of honour.

"I wish you would not talk like that," she said; moving away from him again, restlessly.

"Do you? Well, you shall tell me how I *may* talk," he answered pleasantly; "come away from the window,

from that dreary outlook; you need not look at me, if you don't care to"; for, of course, he had intercepted her hurried glance, and his strange eyes had smiled at her, "but there must be a better alternative than the dripping park."

He wheeled the sofa a little forward for her, more in front of the fire.

"Sit here."

She liked being taken care of, she subsided quite gladly on to the sofa.

"There, that's better. You are over-tired, and you have been over-worried; we must alter all that! Let me put a pillow for your head. What ugly things you have about you, and most of them in the wrong places! Why don't you have silk cushions? Blue, Venetian blue is what your hair really wants for a background, or green." He looked at her reflectively. "Now we can talk."

She found herself reclining in a corner of the Chesterfield sofa. He had flung a careless arm along its back. His broad shoulders and big limbs made her feel shy, insignificant; so did his manner. She was not sure she liked him to-day. He looked so happy and amused, his eyes were shining.

"It is good to be together, isn't it? The Carlton is all very well for a start, but, for a good finish——" There was something intimate, challenging, incomprehensible, in the way he looked at her. She began to hear the quick beats of her heart.

Welch-Kennard had known many women, but he could not quite place this one. Her fluctuating colour puzzled and attracted him, her shyness and graceful awkwardness perplexed and rather excited him.

But she was a friend of the Sphinx, and surely. . . .

Then, too, she had sent for him, and he could not easily believe it was only on account of those unexercised legal abilities of his that she had preferred him to any other lawyer!

"Let us first get clear about this cousin," he said. "We must not go on talking at cross-purposes. I want to understand you; I must understand you. Will you give me your hand for a moment?" He took it easily in his own. "I studied palmistry in the East, and all the things you will not tell me I shall be able to read in this little hand."

"Will it help you with my law affairs?" She tried to be satirical, not very successfully.

"Certainly, decidedly, not a doubt about it." Although her eyes avoided his, she knew he was still smiling. "How can I advise you when I do not know whether you are weak or strong, yielding or firm? Perhaps I shall find you want trustees, guardians, perhaps I shall find you want only—*me!*"

She was still not sure that she liked him, or that she was going to like him. She was almost sorry she had sent for him. But the days had been so dull, so long, since Norman had left her; the only unkind thing Norman had ever done was to die, and leave her so alone. And Fred had said she must have good advice. She had grown appalled in the last few weeks by her utter loneliness.

She was not sure, however, that she was less frightened now by this big man, of whom, after all, she knew so little, who was holding her hand and looking at her so strangely. Yet the hand that held hers was human, pleasant to her touch; she had been intolerably lonely.

And—and, perhaps, there was something in palmistry after all!

"Do you really believe in it?" she asked unsteadily, as he bent his head and seemed to be examining the lines intently. "Tell me what you find? What do you expect to find?"

"I am reading your past. Hush; don't interrupt me." But she was too restless and excited to sit still and not speak.

"And my future?" she asked. She felt his breath on the palm he held upturned to his intent gaze.

"Won't you move the sofa back for me a little from the fire? It's too hot here." She spoke nervously, for his silence grew oppressive; she wanted him to talk.

From her hand his eyes were lifted reflectively, to her face. He looked his fill; her changing colour only made him smile inwardly. He liked the way the wavy auburn hair grew low on her forehead. The dark eyes, with their large pupils, were quite beautiful; he thought he realised why they were dilated. He had known so many emotional women. But Berenice shrank rather into her corner of the sofa, she was playing her *rôle* very well, he thought.

"Have you read my past? Let me hear if you have read it rightly. And my future," she repeated, "what of that?" Her low, nervous voice charmed him, and the fluctuating colour was really entrancing.

"Your future will depend upon your past, of course." He compelled her eyes.

"I will tell you both, if you give me time, both your past and your future. Since you have sent for me to take care of you——"

"Not of *me*, of my business affairs. It was Fred's idea!" she interrupted excitedly.

"Yes, of course, of your affairs, and of you," he answered coolly. "I never do anything by halves. Your affairs and you will be one. I have not decided upon assuming the responsibility of either—yet."

She tried to withdraw her hand; he had held it too long. It made her apprehensive, it tired her, to have her hand in that position. And she was getting so warm, the sofa was much too near the fire.

"I can look after myself," she answered; "I don't want you to look after me."

"It's really not a question of what only *you* want—now." He dropped his voice when he added the last word, softly.

"I think, mind, I only *think*, I want—you. Give me back your hand; do keep still, cheiromancy is not quackery, not guess-work, it is a genuine science, it wants steady attention. I can see nothing if you fidget. What little hands you have, five and three-quarters, I suppose, and the palms so pink!"

Again she tried to draw her hand away. She was anguished in her sudden remembrance of the occasion, of her mourning, of poor Norman. Of course, she knew the language he was talking, the familiar language that all women understand. But she could not, must not, listen to it now. Norman had had a personality, in philanthropic circles Norman Darcy's had been a name to conjure with. She could not, she must not, forget him so soon. Her widowhood was so recent.

Welch-Kennard did not oppose the withdrawal of her hand. He only continued to look at her, to smile at her; he pressed the hand before he relinquished it.

He stood up now, and stretched himself.

How big he was! She suddenly realised how big he was. All the Darcys were small men, neat, precise. Now, it was down upon her that he looked, on the widow's cap surmounting the red bronze tendrils of her hair, on the hands he had released, which lay so white and small on her black dress.

"Do you know that story where the hero goes to a thought-reader, who tells him that one day he will commit a crime? Do you remember how he becomes so fearful of the future she painted that, in sheer self-defence, and to protect himself from a worse sin, since sin he must, he kills a useless old man, throws him over a bridge, and only then is able to resume his normal life?"

She shook her head, she had no remembrance of the story.

Suddenly he flung himself down again beside her, rather closer this time. She hardly knew how to defend herself against him.

"Do you know I have just read the same story, but with a difference? That little pink palm of yours will be stained with a love crime. Give it me again—" but she kept both her hands clasped together—"No! why not? Don't you like me?"

"Not—not quite."

"No wonder you blush! Look at me now; *don't you like me?*"

He was very good-looking; she could not help that hurried glance. His manner and eyes smiled at her, and the smile she caught in his eyes quivered round her own lips; these grew more soft, more alluring—and Welch-Kennard had never denied himself anything.

"Sweet little woman!" His movement was unexpected; before she had time to realise that his face was so near to hers, his arms were around her, and his lips had sought hers, he was kissing her as she had never before been kissed.

A moment, a moment she yielded to him, in surprise, ignorance, terror.

Then she was pushing him from her with both hands, she had struggled away from him, she was crying. In her flushed cheeks, and sobbing breath, and filled eyes, and evident repulsion, he saw, without room for doubt, that, although she was Sybil Heseltine's *protégée*, it was a girl, and not a woman, he had held that moment in his arms, whom he had kissed with such insistence.

And he was half sorry he had blundered, and ashamed. But, nevertheless, he was strangely, irrationally glad.

"I am so sorry, how could I know? I am so sorry, I couldn't help it. How was I to know?"

The words that rose to his lips were the words he spoke. But when she covered her face with her hands, when he saw she was actually crying, and frightened, he was suddenly moved to exquisite gentleness and remorse. He knelt down in front of her.

"Child," he said, "dear one, child, don't cry, I can't bear it. I haven't hurt you, have I, so much as that? Can't you forget it, can't you forgive me? Is a kiss so bad, so wrong?"

But not even her husband had ever kissed her so! She was ashamed, ashamed. She did not hate him; she knew that. She was shocked and excited, and frightened, but she did not hate him. Her heart was beating like an electric engine, she could not answer him for its throbs.

And, as for him, kneeling there, he was almost as much moved as she. Some tenderness, some strangeness of remorse he was unused to feel was like a pain in his heart.

"Are you too angry with me to speak? Don't make me hate myself!"

Presently she took her hands from before her eyes; they were wet, and her hands and she were trembling. But she tried to be a woman, and dignified, tried that her voice should not shake.

"I'm not angry—with you." Her painful blushes burnt her, and she did not look at him, although she felt his presence so acutely. "It is with me . . . with myself. I ought to have known, not to have sent for you, after that evening."

"No, no, no, a thousand times no. It was nothing you did, or said; it is in me, always to behave badly, to let myself go. And you looked so sweet."

The lips he had kissed to that angry scarlet touched him by something pathetic in their tremulousness; he was altogether fascinated and moved, because she was so unlike what he had expected. He had found so many women light, he had forgotten there were others. How came it that he found this indefinable quality in a woman he had met under the *ægis* of the Sphinx? Why had Sybil written that they were made for each other, he, and this—child?

"I want to begin all over again. I have made a mistake; is it unforgiveable—dear?"

His voice was low with tenderness, sweet with tenderness; and she had no experience to guide her.

"Don't send me away from you. Give me another chance. Dear"—for still he was not quite sure—"look

at me, listen to me. I'm so distressed, unhappy. Forgive me."

She had buried her face away from him. Wave after wave of feeling went through her. All the experience was on his side, all the depth on hers. He tried to take her hands, gently, from before her face.

"Can't you find it in your heart to forgive me? Speak to me, dear, speak to me."

"Oh! I can't, I can't. Did you think me— Oh! why did you think I was like that?"

But the party at which he met her had been given by the Sphinx!

"Like what?" he said, coolly. But he was not cool, nor certain. "Like a woman, made for love? Yes. I thought you beautiful, irresistible, sweet. Does that make you angry?"

"But you made me feel—you don't know what you made me feel—*ashamed*."

He could hardly get at her words, through her low sobs; though he bent over her, trying, though now he knelt again beside her, trying.

"I thought nothing, meant nothing, that you would not have me think or know. We are going to be friends, you and I. You want a friend, that is it, isn't it? a friend, and not a lover."

Now she raised her head, eagerly; the eyes and cheeks were wet, and she was flushed, tremulous, adorable.

"Oh! I do, I do."

"*Me?*"

"I"—her head dropped—"I don't know."

"But *I* know. It is me you want. You knew it that first evening."

"I never told Norman. He would not have been

angry, he would have let me talk to him about you; he was like that. You know he was years older than I, and an invalid always—but he was good to me, so good to me that—that I'm ashamed." Her voice sank, and there was a sob in it, her head drooped.

"*You* have nothing of which to be ashamed," he interpolated, quickly. He hated having made a mistake. "I am . . . a little. But the worst of it is, that I want to do the same thing over again! Don't, don't reproach me!" for she made a little sound, a little shrinking movement. "I won't come near you, I won't touch you." He was silent a moment, then the notes in his voice were deep when he added, slowly, almost below his breath. "But we must be friends, you and I, just you and I."

As a wooer of women, Welch-Kennard had been accounted great, but this was altogether a new territory for him. A couple of hours ago he would have said the whole adventure was out of his line. He had no use for more women in his life. And innocence, inexperience, or, perhaps, as he would have put it then, amateurishness, were all qualities of which he had the greatest dread, distaste. He had no illusion about himself!

Three months ago the Sphinx had given a supper-party at the Carlton, and there he had met a pretty woman. He had seen her home after supper. It had not entered his head then, although it did now, that she had not understood one-half of what he had said to her. A sleepy butler, a uniformed hospital nurse hovering somewhere in the background, her own simple "good-night," had ended the adventure before it had begun. He had almost forgotten the incident until Sybil's note reminded him of it. Certainly, there had

been something rare in the quality of her looks, and she had seemed strange among the company that night; but he had forgotten her. Now he set himself to understand. She had touched some unknown, long unused cord in him. Her distress, and painful flush, and the tears he had made her shed, had moved him strangely. He would not leave her until he had reassured her, until she knew she might be at ease with him.

Presently they began to talk. Berenice Darcy's history was very simple. Her father had been a clerk for over twenty years in the house of Darcy Bros. He had married young, and quite suitably; his wife had borne him a son, had died, and been decorously mourned. But his son was twelve, and himself over forty, when the romance of his life flashed upon him suddenly from the grey London pavement. The romance of a clerk in the office of Messrs. Darcy Bros. had its necessary limits. Old Annesley married Berenice's mother. But the respectability depressed her vitality; she died when her daughter was still a baby, not before she had succeeded in giving her young step-son a new view of life. It was a view that banished him from his father's house.

Berenice told Errington, as they talked together, that her step-brother lived in Galatz, in Roumania; she had not seen him since she was a child. She told Errington, too, of her childhood. She had been brought up by two old aunts of her father, who kept a boarding-house in a cathedral city. There she learnt ways and means, and piety, combined, and so they cramped her childish vision. She went back to her father when she was sixteen, and studied shorthand and typewriting at the Metropolitan School. When she was competent for her first place, it happened that the invalid head of the firm

wanted a secretary for his private philanthropies. The rest was inevitable.

How good he had been to her! She tried to tell Kennard something of Norman Darcy's unselfishness, consideration, generosity, to the poor girl he had married. She could not have told him of Norman Darcy's love for her, for she hardly realised it, even now. She did not realise Norman Darcy's love for her until the years had sped, and she had learned, in the bitter school of experience, that the heart of love is sacrifice, that it would give, and give always, asking nothing in return, and that only this is love.

It was strange, though, what pleasure it gave her to talk of the past, of herself, and of Norman Darcy, to this new friend of hers. She felt that he was infinitely sympathetic. He had pleaded for forgiveness for that kiss he had stolen! She could not speak her pardon; what he had done was unpardonable! But the barriers were no longer strong and conventional between them, and now speech, too, helped to flood them. They floated towards intimacy, as the evening wore on. How strange, how good it was, to hear his deep voice echoing her thoughts, confirming her views, meeting her reminiscences.

To him there was less that was strange in that hour of intimacy; all that was strange was the little that it succeeded, the little that it promised.

He wanted, all the time he wanted, to ask her, how long she had known Sybil Heseltine, how well she knew her? That was whilst he was listening with half an ear to confidences almost girlish. It was not strange to Errington Welch-Kennard to be listening to a woman's confidences, but these confidences were strange!

The narration of her simple, guarded life, her gratitude to her late husband for having elevated her from amanuensis to wife, the implication or suggestion that his condition of health rendered the tie a purely nominal one, her appeal, surely it was an appeal, to his chivalry in his own treatment of her, touched him curiously. So had her distress. So, and that was the devil of it, did her beauty!

But he was not going to entangle himself; his hands were full. He would help her through with her affairs, and then, well, then it would be time enough to consider the situation. Clever as he was, and experienced, there were some things he did not know, his own weakness for instance, the limitations of his self-control.

"Well! now we have grown a little clearer with each other, I think, I hope. Now we must really tackle these papers in earnest, I am afraid."

He moved from his seat beside her on the sofa abruptly; she was really charming, and naïve. He went over to the table.

"Copy of marriage settlement, the will, the old partnership deed." As he enumerated the documents, he separated them, and placed them on one side; but his mind was not on the work. "Are there some india-rubber bands in any of these drawers?"

He had been so sympathetic, so apparently interested; he had drawn her out, and she had talked more about herself than she had ever talked. Now nothing could be more business-like, more commonplace than his words, and his manner. It was impossible to deny that she felt a quick little chill of disappointment. She had been so happy, talking. Now she wondered if anything she had told him about herself had repelled or estranged him;

she wondered if he did not like her as much as he had done at the beginning of the interview. She felt herself blushing again; but, at least, she could meet his change of mood.

"I think there are some rubber bands in the left-hand corner drawer, the small one; I used to use them for my husband's letters. There are some large envelopes just in front of you."

"Thanks. Oh, yes, here they are."

She knew now that she liked him, that she found him intensely sympathetic, she had never liked any one so well except Norman. And *he* had never been tired of listening to her. Every movement of her new lawyer was lithe, attractive; Norman had moved slowly, and with difficulty. Welch-Kennard's good looks were just those that specially appealed to her. He was so strong, and virile, with something dominant about him, yet tender. From lover to friend he had switched himself suddenly, even as an electric light is suddenly switched off. She wondered if he would get as quickly from friendship to indifference. Was he going to be her legal adviser, only that, nothing more? Whatever he had decided on being, he would be! She was ashamed again that she was disappointed, and chilled. She covered up her shame with quick talk about investments, transfers, a little of the jargon she had caught from Fred. Meanwhile, Kennard was gathering together the papers, somewhat abstractedly, perhaps; he was hardly listening.

It was not as yet within the limits of her knowledge of men to realise that he had got up only when he could no longer sit quietly by her side, that he was substituting his interest in the papers for the desire to see

her pallor change, to test once more what her scarce-tasted lips might yield.

He knew it was time for him to go. He had no intention of letting his impulse master him again. The situation had to be thought out, if it would bear thinking of. He had to realise clearly what her attraction was for him. Of course, when he was not handicapped by associating her, mentally, with her hostess of the Carlton supper-party, he recognised the difference between a garden where all men might roam and one set round with privet hedge. The scent of the flowers came to him, garden lily, sweet briar and woodbine; it was years since such a perfume had blown about him. Had it, indeed, ever come before? Anyway, he must go away, and think.

"By this time to-morrow I shall have mastered all the details," he said. "I may have something to say to you about them before I meet those men again, as soon as I have run through all these papers. Could I see you again if necessary?"

Anyway he would be her lawyer. He had got out of the habit of doing this sort of work, but once he had known his books quite well, and there was no difficulty in getting them up again. Besides, there was sure to be some one at the office who could put him right if he got into difficulties.

"Oh, yes! I want to get it all finished, out of my head. I lie awake at night and wonder whether I have signed anything I ought not to, or sworn to anything that was not true. I dream of 'interest,' and find myself counting again and again the difference between 'money on deposit' and the debentures of English railways," she said, laughing a little, nervous still, uncertain of herself and him.

He laughed too, but his thoughts were abstracted. Why on earth had she been allowed to sup with Sybil that night? Of what had her husband been thinking?

"You haven't got used to being a rich woman yet?" he said.

"No; I don't suppose I ever shall!"

She had risen to say "good-bye" to him. Her slenderness was really exquisite, and all her transient, flushing colour rare and delicate.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, impulsively. "I'm dining alone. I'll run through these papers whilst I'm at dinner, then I might come round, about nine, and talk them over with you."

"It would be very good of you."

"Would it? I don't know!"

He took his leave hurriedly. As she gave him her hand in farewell, he bent his lips to it. His eyes said something his words omitted, and set her heart beating again.

She was surprised to find herself alone. But it would be long before her solitude was lonely. So much of him remained with her; so much for her to flush in encouraging, to pale in repulsing, to dream over, and be restless with. Her short married life had left her still a girl; but the Sphinx's lawyer had shown her, as in a flash, the paths that women trod. And all her calm was gone.

CHAPTER II

"DEAR CHILD, —

"*Maldichos sean todos papeles.* These documents are not as simple as they looked; and, alas! I find I must spend the evening with them, and not with you. May I come, instead, to-morrow at twelve?

"Send me a little line to say I am quite forgiven. *Chi ama, qual chi muore, Non ha da gire al ciel dal mondo altr'ale.* Both of them rustled about your charming head this afternoon, and I tried to bring my heaven down to me, that was all. Dream of flowers to-night, of roses and lilies. Leave all weightier matters to

"Your lawyer to command,

"E. W.-K."

His signature was a curious hieroglyphic, and he was among the last of the survivors of the sealing-wax habit; a big black splash bore his crest.

The disingenuous letter was eminently characteristic. After he had left Berenice, he had suddenly remembered he had promised Sybil to report the result of his visit to Prince's Gate. He never willingly broke an appointment with the Sphinx. Therefore, he stopped at a florist's and bought a large bunch of white lilac, and a few exquisite *malmaisons*. Arrived at his chambers, he dashed off his letter to his new client, attached to it the flowers, and sent these to Prince's Gate. Then he dressed, and dined leisurely. But afterwards, it was to

Hans Crescent that he directed his hansom, instead of to Prince's Gate.

Sybil Heseltine, whom her friends called "the Sphinx," was a hedonist, with level brows and a dead-white skin, who wore Egyptian designs on her Greek tea-gowns, and talked of superabundant health and vigour, whilst she lay perpetually on her sofa, propped up by silken cushions, vital only in her wonderful eyes.

The supper at the Carlton after the *première* at His Majesty's Theatre had been one of the rare occasions on which she left the *bibels*, and Italian book-bindings, Eastern embroideries, gems and old ivories, that constituted her legitimate atmosphere. In truth, she was an invalid, although any talk or thought of illness was banished from her drawing-room.

Her days were numbered; that was one of the secrets she and Kennard held in common, and of which they never spoke to each other. It was long since she had had the prospect of average years.

There had been a time when romance had gathered about her name, when books and poems had been dedicated to her, songs sung in her honour. She had played Beatrice to Algernon Heseltine's Dante, and there had been no figure more prominent in the world she frequented. In oil and in pastel, in water-colour, and black and white, she had graced the walls of winter and summer exhibitions, the pages of illustrated magazines, the weekly editions of fashion papers. Now she was forgotten. Between the time when she had been celebrated in song and now, when she was forgotten, had come that which made forgetfulness kind. But, in the days of her triumph, no less than in the days when the very name she bore stank in the nostrils of the world,

when she was abhorred, execrated, stoned, for a fault that was not hers, Errington Welch-Kennard had been her friend, defender, apologist. He was younger than she, in some ways, perhaps, weaker. And she had influenced him perpetually; she had always wielded a peculiar influence.

To-night she greeted him with eager curiosity. She questioned and cross-questioned him with the searching, impatient, inconsequent curiosity of a child.

"Well! did you see her? What did she say? How did she look? Did you fall in love with her? Is she fretting after her husband? Tell me all, everything. I've been counting the hours until you came."

"I hope you do that always," he said lightly.

"Oh, yes! of course," she answered, impatiently. "But now I want to hear about you and Berenice. Did you see her alone?"

There was no fault to be found with Sybil's background, the cushion was of the softest yellow silk, and it aureoled the unnatural pallor of her face. Because he had not yet been able to dismiss from his mind Berenice's crude background, nor her beauty against it, he fell back into the light and intimate banter that was the habitual currency between himself and his old friend.

"No, no! you have no rival, I am still your beseeching, hopeless lover. I am still at your feet, Sphinx. Are you still cruel?"

He dropped easily into the low chair by her side; he took her hand and held it against his cheek.

"Why do you talk to me about other women? Why have you never loved me yourself? I have never been able to understand that. Explain yourself, Sphinx."

Errington Welch-Kennard occupied a special position in this strange *ménage*. He helped to make its atmosphere, and keep it intact. Perhaps he knew better than any other man what had reduced the woman's originally splendid vitality to its present low level. Whatever he knew he ignored.

That was what made the secure foundation of their friendship, and the intimacy that was built upon it. He knew everything, and had helped when help was terribly needed. He had had no gift from her in exchange; if her lips were soiled, it was not from his kisses. Only of late, since love had gone out of her life, perforce, had he revived its language, to give her pleasure. Whatever he was, or might be, to other women, to this one he was only infinitely pitiful. To him, who knew everything, it seemed imperative that, in her failing days, she should live as she wished, speak as she list, be somewhat cherished. And what she cared for most was listening to the echoes of bygone days.

She liked her drawing-room to be a Palace of Truth; all the men, and the few women, who came there she encouraged to talk of themselves, of each other, with an undraped, indecorous candour. Kennard fell easily and always into her mood, and, as love was so often the theme of conversation, and he was so often there, the fiction had been banteringly started, and was kept up, even when they were alone, that he was her always rejected, always aspiring, lover.

There was a mysterious "Hyperion," however, who was supposed to stand ever between him and his desires. That "Apollo," or "Hyperion," was the name she gave to a syringe with a little sharp needle attachment, another secret which only those two knew, and of which

neither of them ever betrayed their knowledge to each other.

"Why are you always talking to me about other women, Sphinx? It is unkind of you, unfair."

"I like to collect, not to be collected! You make a cult of infidelity, and it amuses me better to be spectator than to take a hand in the game. Then, I couldn't compete with Lady Helbert. How many letters a day did she write you, Brigham, at six-and-eight a letter? Let me see, when you persuaded her to return to the bedside of her dying husband—it *was* his third attack of D.T., wasn't it, dear?—Elsa Beethoven began to weep out the distresses of her neglected soul on your broad shoulders. I don't weep, and I haven't a soul, I couldn't enter the lists with Elsa Beethoven. Now there is 'Norma'——"

"A client, Sphinx, a client."

"Oh, yes! of course, I forget. They are all clients. You keep an electric brougham for her, don't you? so that she can come and discuss Lord Manningtree's delinquencies with you at all hours. And you paid Cartier's bill for that diamond necklace out of your costs. You see, I know everything. I suppose one day I shall come to you about Apollo. Either I shall elope with him, or he will desert me, he has a curious temper. Would an action lie against Apollo, Solon?"

"I am not sure, I must look up my law. You and your friends appear determined to keep my nose to the grindstone."

"Berenice! Tell me about Berenice. How did you get on?"

"Berenice was charming, but immature, not what you represented her, Sphinx. Tell me how she became a

friend of yours, and why. I cannot see the point of attachment."

"Can't you?" Her manner was full of mystery; then she laughed lightly. "No! I suppose that may puzzle you. Perhaps she is not quite so innocent as she seems; how does that view please you?"

"Not at all," he said, coolly.

"Then you really do——"

"I really do want to know when and where you met her, and why she comes here. For whose benefit was she at your supper-party? It was not for mine, you remember; you resented that I drove home with her!"

"Therefore you told me the next day that you did not admire her!"

"Of course! Isn't that the way to play the game?"

"Oh, no! you were quite wrong, you ought to have been candid with me; candour is one of the privileges of your position."

"Did I admire her?"

"You fell headlong in love with her. I was sure of it at the time."

"But I disguised it, surely, I disguised it?"

"Not from me, I knew it at once."

"But, since then?"

"There was Norma——"

"Oh, yes!"

"And you forgot Berenice."

"True! But you have forced her on my memory. You sent me to her to-day. Now I want details. How did you come across her? How long have you known her? And why——"

"Well, I suppose one must tell one's lawyer everything, particularly if one hasn't got a clergyman, a

doctor, or a bosom friend, in whom to confide falsely. And I don't keep a diary! You know Harold Scott-Brooking?"

"No. 117 in your collection? Otherwise entitled 'Kensington de Town Hall'?"

"Yes!"

"The man who strides this narrow world like a Colossus, one foot in Bayswater and the other in Bohemia?"

"Quite right, his life is running past him, between his legs. He cannot stop it, he is too busy balancing himself and his bank book. He is quite rich, and rather swift."

"But what, in the name of the New Oxford Dictionary,—don't you think that is a highly original swear?—has he got to do with Mrs. Norman Darcy?"

"He had written an operetta, and was prospecting the hemisphere for a librettist. He met Berenice Darcy at a book tea, or a progressive dinner, or a tennis ball, something suburban, I forget exactly what. It seems they played a ridiculous game, during which she wrote two wonderful lines of verse; one of them was somebody else's, that is the essence of the game, but he did not find it out until afterwards. Anyway he pursued her home, was introduced to a paralysed husband, who was overjoyed at the prospect of safe literary pursuits for his relict. He was dying then. But dying is a long job, Errington." She halted a moment, but recovered herself, and went on lightly: "In three or four visits, always chaperoned by the paralysed husband, a lyric was produced. Of course, Brooking wrote it himself, although he swore to me that she had done it. I admired the lyric, I wrote to her about the operetta." Her voice changed again, grew hard. "My name and reputation

did not seem to have penetrated to Prince's Gate. She rushed to call upon me, she found me unusual, fascinating. I gather I *am* unlike the Darcy women! Brooking met her here, went on seeing her, he vowed she had lyrical genius, and that her hair inspired him. She was exquisitely ignorant, completely uncultured. I asked her of Browning, and she responded with Pitman. Who was Pitman, Errington, and why did he write shorthand? I thought she would make a sensation if I took her with a select party to the Carlton. . . ."

"If you had been a man I should have said, 'What a blackguard thing to do.'"

"I know. But Brooking is such a dear."

"But surely, my memory does not play me false, surely, he was not there at all!"

There was a gleam of malicious laughter and remembrance in her brilliant eyes, they were eyes full of colour, set like jewels in her head.

"No! after all, he was not there. His aunt or his mother, or some incongruous relation, died, and he could not, or would not, sup in public the same night! You filled his chair, you remember you were asked at the last moment, and I did not explain. Since that evening Berenice has written nothing of the opera, and declined to talk about the gifted operettist. She has, on the other hand, displayed much interest in your career, with which I, so to speak, spoon-fed her, after I had peptonised it."

He got up, and walked away from the sofa. Leaning against the mantelpiece, he remained silent a few moments. He was feeling acutely irritated, but he knew that it was irrational.

"What did you tell her?" he asked, "what form did the pepsine take?"

"Oh! I made you quite easy to digest. Surely, you realised that to-day?"

"No! no! I cannot quite say that I did."

His words were mere emanations from his silence, representing the surface only, nothing of his inner thoughts. She watched him from her sofa-grave. How far had it gone? she wondered. Presently her laugh broke the silence.

"So you found her difficult?" she jeered.

"So I found her—impossible," he retorted.

"A Welch-Kennard bested by a Berenice Darcy! Wonderful!"

He was still speaking from his surfaces, not his depths.

"Oh! I'm no longer the man for a siege. If the defences are not down, and the entrance easy, I ride away again. I suppose it is vanity, or indifference!" he said, lightly, recovering or endeavouring to recover his equanimity.

"Or the approach of your fortieth year," she suggested, amiably.

"That's unkind, Sphinx. But tell me—why did you write me that letter, why did you send me to her, and order me to do my best for her? I know you revel in your inconsistencies, but I want to reconcile them."

Anyone who knew Sybil Heseltine at all of late years would have been surprised at the sudden softness in her face, softness being the one quality of which her best friends might have thought her incapable. She, too, grew introspective.

"Ah! why, indeed?" was all she said. After a pause, she added, meditatively:

"She has about eight thousand a year."

He frowned that away.

"And it is really time you married." Kennard knew that there was no use endeavouring to force the issue, if she had not decided to explain herself.

"Don't you think that is rather a strong course?" he queried lightly.

"Um—perhaps. But you would wear the yoke easily."

"Seriously, now, Sybil?"

"Seriously, Berenice is an embryo, with infinite possibilities. When she was at the supper she was a married woman, new, attractive, exactly to your taste. You have not been a co-respondent for two years—eighteen months, isn't it? I did not want you to be so soon again the hero of a new scandal, so I let you forget her, I made you forget her, whilst keeping your memory alive with her. But, when her letter came——"

He had to read between the lines of her explanation, and, of course, it softened him. He *was* weak where women were concerned.

"Now things are different, she is free, you can woo her, wed her, settle down, be happy. Will you be happy? I wonder! It all came to my mind when I got her note. Almost before, I think, when I first heard that Norman Darcy was dead. Why are you looking at me like that? What will you buy me for a wedding present? You will have to give me a wedding present when you marry, won't you? I have almost set my heart on the MS. of 'Paradise Lost.' It would be so appropriate! And five thousand pounds will be nothing to you if you marry Berenice Darcy."

He wanted to thank her for thinking of his interests, he wanted to tell her how absurd, how impossible was

her scheme; but his words and thoughts kept no pace together.

"You grow quite epic!" was all his answer.

"I want to urge you forward. Marry her quickly. Eight thousand a year is tempting, with a skin like that thrown in!"

"Her husband has been dead about six weeks!"

"You have a Shakespearean precedent."

"Was ever woman in such humour wooed?"

"Precisely."

"But that affair wasn't a conspicuous success."

"I believe you are in love with her."

"I am in love with love."

"Still?"

"Always."

That this phosphorescent tragic relic of what had once been a gifted woman meant well by him, Errington Welch-Kennard knew.

It was not strange that it should be so. He had been a boy when Algernon had first brought him to the house, and, when he realised into what he had come, he stayed away. But, unlike the others, he had returned when danger threatened. He was a man then, and beyond certain calumnies; he had stayed beside the Heseltines when he stayed alone.

He had returned too late to save her, or any of them, from wreck, only in time to engulf, or nearly engulf, himself in the mud and refuse that whirled about them. The orgies of that devastated Gomorrah he had never shared. He had felt himself strong enough, then, in the pride of his intellect, and appreciation of greater intellect, to stand forth before the world as the champion of Algernon Heseltine. When he realised all the

cause for which he was giving battle, and shuddered at it, he remained, nevertheless, by the side of Algernon's wife, for he realised, at the same time, that she was standing alone to bear a burden that could fit no woman's shoulders.

And, practically, by her side he had stood ever since, not counting the cost to himself.

The cost had been greater than he knew, but not greater than she knew. She was going to pay it back to him, with Berenice Darcy; she was going to die out of debt.

Errington Welch-Kennard had distinguished himself at the university. After his first in classics, the law tripos was child's play to him. Too much money, too excellent a physique, had made havoc of his first year in London. It was in the interval between the time he had been taken to Algernon Heseltine's house, and had fled from it, and the time when he had returned out of a false sense of honour, that he made his first mistake.

He had just passed his law examinations, and was about to enter his father's office, when he made the acquaintance of a public singer and left England with her touring company, rather than be separated from her. The story of his life in America, in the train of the opera company of which she was the star, reached England in distorted fragments. He returned to find his place in the office, in his father's house, still open to him; but the family, the friends, cool. Their coolness became Arctic when he openly declared himself the champion of Algernon Heseltine, speaking of the man's intellect, when they spoke of his evil reputation, vehemently asserting his place in literature, whilst they could not see

beyond the fumes of the scandal which had obscured his growing fame.

Half in defiance, half in pride, Errington went beyond his own convictions, stretching his intellectuality to cover all that revolted him. The revolt spread, he became appalled and sickened by what he saw. It was before the scandal about Algernon Heseltine had evoked its legal consequences. The brilliant, bestial set about him grew ever more daring and triumphant in their vices. Errington's unstrung nerves, and loosened moral fibre, found the refuge in the society of women that other youngsters, equally shaken, found in drink, in gambling, in opium. Sybil, grateful to him for staying beside them, grateful to him for friendship, generosity, loyalty, encouraged him always to the wrong course. She meant no harm to him; yet it was to her and hers it was primarily due that his life had been wasted in pursuit, intrigue and evasion.

It was Sybil Heseltine and her fate that had kept him always in revolt, the Heseltine influence had driven his life from its true course.

But to-night his pity for Algernon Heseltine's widow was tinged with something of repulsion. He wished, he knew it was unreasonable, but he wished the Sphinx had left Berenice Darcy to nurse her invalid husband, to spend her sweet, untainted days without a glimpse into this lurid world where she herself was blazing out her end. The Sphinx had been a creature of circumstance, of abominable circumstance, but to-night, not for the first time, he felt what a poor, what a desperate retort she had made, and was making.

CHAPTER III

THAT was what he thought when he left her that night. It was late before he came away, but the room was already full of men. The public had forgotten Sybil Heseltine, and society had forgotten her, nevertheless she did not live alone.

Algernon had many disciples. As soon as it was safe, and she obscure, they rallied round his wife, who seemed all of him that was left for them. Here were the friends of his brilliant boyhood, wrecks and derelicts, bitter, and tired, and old, failures one and all. There were here, too, men from the universities, exotic, intellectual, perverse, younger men from Woolwich and Sandhurst, vicious and pallid and eager. A scheme was on foot for bringing back to his native land the ashes of the great one, the Master. His death had canonised him; already a cult for him was aflame in France and in Germany, and other intellectual centres. Why should England lag behind? She had murdered his body, would she throttle his fame? So they talked, hotly; some with sincerity, conviction, some because the Sphinx willed it. On the dull horizon of their normal lives the Sphinx and her drawing-room were the golden haze. They were decadents and weaklings, essential ineffectives, but even such as these can dream!

Errington was used to her environment, to the tone of her house; but it jarred upon him to-night. He found the loose and brilliant talk, the note of supreme

intimacy, the indecorous personal candour, the classic gossip and allusion, ugly and distasteful. The talk irked him, he was sickened with the cult to-night, as once in youth.

Sybil, joining in the talk, leading it, yet watched him with that strange softness. When, from among these disciples of hers, a new prophet should arise, preaching tumult and disorder, the cult of pure intellect, and the forcible uprooting of the cramping hedges that divided the world into territorial moralities, that prophet would not be Errington Welch-Kennard. Well, she would help him on his own way.

She called him over to her, put out her hand, and bade him "Good-night."

"Go away, you are out of sympathy with us. Your attitude of disapproval is too tedious." Then, in a lower voice, she added: "Dear Errington, go home. You are dreaming of Berenice, I can see it. But don't look so distressed about it; your talents lie in other directions than ours. You will be very happy, and you have nothing with which to reproach yourself; it is not your fault that you are incapable of the higher philosophy."

He wondered, when he got into the air, into the clean, night air that was such a contrast to the atmosphere of the drawing-room he had left, whether that was indeed true. As far as the Sphinx was concerned, at least, had he nothing with which to reproach himself?

He had never tried to make her change her views, he had only upheld her, sympathised with her, stood by her. She had had to bear unbearable things. Now let her lull herself to sleep with morphia or with arguments, she had paid all her penalties in advance. That

was what he had said, and thought, and he had made no effort toward her uplifting.

She had had a splendid vision, a phantasmagoria of indefinable brilliancy. The man who had shown it to her had shown himself to her last of all, with his genius all defiled and befouled, and himself degraded almost out of semblance to humanity. But the genius had been there. Passionately she had clung to that, and preached it; otherwise all day and all night she would have gazed into hell.

Errington, during his walk from Hans Crescent to Park Street, forgot, as always, his repulsion in pity, and gradually his mind resumed its former tone.

The suggestion she had made to him, she had made, Sphinx as she was, because she cared enough for him to wish him happy.

It was absurd, of course—such a suggestion as his marriage. His father and his partner had urged it on him often. For if, as it seemed, he could not live without feminine companionship, why not let the knowledge lead him to its legitimate conclusion? they had argued. But he had never known a woman he wished to marry. Notwithstanding his life, his erratic adventures, he was genuinely sensitive, and intolerant, a neurotic, who could suffer from untoward yawn or sneeze, become nauseated by a perfume or facial trick, grow sleepless, without appetite, ill, when he had to listen to, and answer, babble, play the lover at other times that he wished, endure “scenes,” when his solitude was invaded and his freedom cramped. It was ten years since he had tried such an experiment, but then he had suffered too much not to remember.

All this Sybil knew as well as he; but he was older

now, perhaps more tolerant. And, financially at least, he was as near the end of his tether as she of her days. He had seen enough already of Berenice Darcy's affairs to realise that her fortune was large, solid, and completely at her disposal.

He paced his room restlessly, when he reached home that night, remembering. But it was not of Berenice's fortune he was thinking when, at length, he got to his bed. He forgot Berenice's fortune, and the Sphinx's advice, in the long hours that followed.

What haunted him that night, in his short snatches of excited sleep, were the hair's red-brown, and the eyes' brown depths, of his new client, her mobile smiles, with tears so near them, the scarlet softness of those un-kissed corners of her reluctant mouth, her slenderness, the un-awakened sensuousness that hid itself in her shyness with him. Not since he had been a boy had he passed such a night.

He was in two minds about going to her at all the next day, notwithstanding his letter and his promise. His restless night annoyed him when he reviewed it in the clear light of day. To let this slip of a girl get into his blood, inflame and haunt him, seemed the merest folly. He was not the man for matrimony; the Sphinx's suggestion was absurd. And anything short of marriage did not bear thinking of, it was not in the range of practical politics. He was not a seducer, and this would be a seduction. All the many women he had known had been women of the world, ready for him or another; but Berenice was different.

He went down to his office the next morning, with three-fourths of his mind made up to turning her affairs over to his partners. He did not know that that very

morning Berenice was walking about her over-furnished drawing-room, with its burden of ormolu and upholstery, counting the hours until he came. For, her night, too, had been disturbed.

He would go to Japan. It was three years since he had tried the anodyne of the tea-houses, and he had not extracted all they could yield him. There were several matters bothering him that would probably right themselves if he got away. He was up to his neck in debts and difficulties; things of this kind have a way of accumulating about a man who lives casually, keeps no accounts, and has the bailiffs in before he remembers there is a writ against him! His last adventure had been a very expensive one, a question of Russian sables and a bill for jewellery. There were complications threatening there, also. Altogether, it would be well for him to absent himself from London.

Messrs. Kennard and Carker were a very old-established firm, of which his father had been the founder and head. His partners, although they quite realised his possibilities, recognised that they could not rely upon him for regular work. They would be glad to have the Darcy business, it ought to prove lucrative, and it was not the first good business their erratic partner had brought them. He was too proud, too vain a man, to have remained a partner in the firm, shirking his share of the work, if he had not known that he was of value to them, notwithstanding. That the Darcy estate was a good one to get into the office, was the fact upon which he concentrated his mind on his way down to Southampton Street.

But, when he looked into the papers, they proved more complicated, and more interesting, than he had supposed.

There really was a nice point in the interpretation of the partnership deed; and, in a business making between twenty and thirty thousand pounds a year, it was important to find out exactly to what share the widow of its founder was entitled. He spoke of the matter to Edward Carker, who had chancery law at his fingertips, and he, also, recognised, at once, how important it was to secure their client's interest, and also how difficult it might prove to do so.

There seemed something unchivalrous, something rather mean, in leaving her in the lurch; and, with all his faults, Errington was not a coward. He might secure her an extra thousand or so a year. Edward Carker, of course, could do as much as he. But would he? That was the question. Theirs was really a very large concern, and it was more than probable the matter would be turned over to a clerk.

A day or so of sophistical irresolution culminated, of course, in finding him again in Prince's Gate. She awaited him in her black dress and absurd cap; but she looked like a girl notwithstanding, and an exceptionally pretty one! The drawing-room set his teeth on edge no less than the library had done. It was furnished in the most elaborate mid-Victorian manner, the ormolu was overpowering, the rich red damask sofas and curtains accentuated it; he was stunned by its sheer atrocity.

She had thought about nothing but him since yesterday. He could not but note how her colour rose, how nervous was her greeting. He promised himself that if at first he had behaved badly, misread, wronged her, to-day he would make amends. But the drawing-room solaced his conscience,

"It was very kind of you to send me those flowers," she began. She had the gift of handling blooms, and it pleased him, as he emerged gradually from the shock of the ormolu, to see, on a small table, by her chair, the vases that held his lilies, tall and separate, his roses, with their drooped heads and leafage.

"I want to be kind to you, if you will let me." Then he added quickly, "I am going to get you at least another thousand a year from the business. Am I to give you details, or only results?"

"Oh! results, please. Perhaps, if you are not busy, . . ." (hesitating), "you see I am not quite sure what one may ask of one's solicitor." She was charmingly shy and blushed easily. He looked at her with an expression that hardly wanted words to make it clear to her that he admired her.

"You may ask your *friend* anything, there is nothing he would not do for you." He was surprised at his own warmth. "What is it you want to ask me?"

"I am having so many letters from people whom Norman helped. I want to do everything the same as he did. You know he was on the committee of so many charities, and, privately, too, he was always giving. Fred said I ought not to undertake anything definitely, I ought not to make any promises, until I saw how things would arrange themselves. But it is difficult to put off people who are poor, who are anxious to know if they can still depend upon the incomes they have had. May I trouble you with all this?"

How differently would most of the women he knew be taking a sudden accession of wealth! They would be thinking of dress and jewellery, Monte Carlo and millinery. He was touched by her desire to walk in her

husband's footsteps; but, perhaps, it was because her brown eyes were looking at him so softly.

"I have been making a list, this morning, of charities he supported. But it is not only these, I should like to do something personally, in honour of him, as it were, to keep his memory alive; I don't think there were many men as good as Norman."

She was three or four-and-twenty, and would have an income of about ten thousand a year. What possibilities there were in her life! Errington was a little chilled that Norman Darcy should have so much of her thoughts, a great deal moved by her appeal that he should help her to follow Norman's philanthropic footsteps. There are few men to whom the simple goodness of a pretty woman fails to appeal, and Kennard was not of them.

"I am so little experienced, it would be so kind if you would help me. You, in your profession, must come across so much hardship; I have been thinking, wondering, if I might ask you to help me. I don't want to do only what every one has done, hospitals and that sort of thing; I want to help people who haven't been thought of, my mind is full of it. Not old people; it seems to me they don't matter," she interjected, laughingly, "no, I don't mean that exactly. But children, or girls like the one I was, or people who are not ill enough to be in hospitals, or well enough to be in lodgings. I don't want to give away only money; I want to do something myself. I tried to make Fred understand, but Fred is so conventional. I was thinking—" she stumbled a little now and blushed, and her eyes fell before his, "that you were not conventional; you might tell me what I can do."

"No! I am not very conventional."

Her smile was tremulous, his whimsical, perhaps remorseful.

"So you are to play Don Quixote in petticoats, and I am to find you in windmills! But I may have to go abroad. What if I have to go abroad?"

She looked up, startled, there was no subtlety or disguise about her, her sweet lips quivered, and her eyes were suddenly sad. "Go abroad! Oh! must you? I had begun to count upon you." Eyes and voice were near to tears.

She tempted him no less to-day than yesterday.

"Well, I must see what I can do for you first. There, don't look so disappointed. I won't disappoint you. You want to help the unhelpable, that is so, isn't it? But what are you going to do for yourself, by and by, when the first days of your mourning are over? What are your dreams for yourself? Travel, picture galleries, mountains? Races, balls, diamonds? You know you are beautiful, don't you?"

"Oh! no, no."

"But you are. And you will have admirers, lovers. Have you thought of nothing but how you are going to distribute your wealth?"

She was young enough, ingenuous enough, to blush when he praised her, to be strangely uplifted and glad that he thought her beautiful. Right into the background of her mind she had pushed away the memory of that kiss. She had piled lumber in front of it. Yet it was there as a secret, somewhat sweet. She knew it was wrong, she had put it out of sight, turned the key on it with quick trembling fingers. But it was there. And to-day when she looked on his handsome

face, and eloquent eyes, and the strength and fine manhood of him, she could not but be a little thrilled at the knowledge of the secret they held in common, the moment when she had felt the surprise of his lips and his arms, and found herself startled and shocked by that assault, already softened and sweetened in the retrospect. To her he could not but be different from all other men; seeing that he and she held that secret together, and to no one else had she yielded so much.

They sat there talking until lunch was announced. She showed him again how young and soft her heart was. To her, everybody was just what he or she seemed, and the goodness of the world was only checked by its poverty and wants. If only she could relieve those! that was her cry. She was just as restless, just as eager, just as full of life, as any of the young women he had met or known, only her ideals were different, and her self was not to the fore. He was entranced, he had known so many women, his life had been full of women. Now he felt that he had really known nothing, that there had been a world of women hidden away from him.

"But who taught you, child, who taught you your desires, how you must use your money?"

"If—if I know anything, if there is any good in me, it is to Norman I owe it. He was always ill, always, from the first day I came to be his secretary; but he was always thinking what he could do for other people. The letters he dictated I could hardly take down sometimes, for crying. He seemed to know what to say, so that people should not mind asking him for things, but should feel how he liked to give them. He had the most exquisite sensitiveness."

She began to look back, to see how things had been with them. She was happy in talking to this man, as he was encouraging her to do, about herself, about her past! He was so sympathetic, and the future stretched bright before her, with him to help in all her schemes, to show her the way, to guide her. She saw that he was clever, unconventional, that he knew at once what she had in her mind. The poor incapables for whom there were no institutions! it was for them she would use her money. She did not want to be independent, to stand alone. She had been content to be guided by Norman Darcy, she was glad, she was nervous, she was exhilarated, at the prospect of being led by Errington Welch-Kennard.

He realised well enough the danger of it, in a way, the pathos of it. She was absolutely alone in the world.

"It was when I lost my father, four years ago, and Mr. Darcy was ordered abroad. I did not know what I should do, I had to look out for another situation immediately. It isn't easy to get a post as secretary; and then I should have had to live alone, or go back to my aunts at Salisbury. Norman knew all about it, for father had been twenty years with the firm. He asked me if I would like to go to Italy with him. Of course, I knew what an invalid he was and that he might never get better. He thought it was better I should be married to him."

The history was so simple, and so simply told.

"And you loved him?"

Welch-Kennard ought not to have asked that, he knew he ought not to have asked it. He saw the flush, the almost painful doubt in the questioning eyes she turned

on him. Love! how little she knew of it—as yet. And this was the girl to whom he had come yesterday.

He felt hot, ashamed, as he remembered how, and with what thoughts, he had come to her yesterday.

“Luncheon is served.” The announcement saved the necessity for a reply to the question that ought never to have been asked.

“You will join me at lunch, won’t you? I have so many meals alone.”

It was prominently true, in this big house there was only this slender girl, and, of course, her days must be lonely, empty.

“It was different when Norman was here. There were always people coming in and out, and the doctor lived in the house with us at the last, and Fred was here most days.”

“Oh! yes, Fred!”

He had forgotten Fred. He followed her down to the dining-room.

“I have a clerk meeting me here at 2.30. So you are not to be consulted about details, only results?”

She was so glad he was going to lunch with her, and that she was not going to lose him yet.

“Tell me what you think I ought to know.”

Of course, it struck him, he would not have been the man he was if it had not, how badly everything was done in this wealthy household. In the furnishing of the house, in the cooking and ordering of the lunch, he saw that everything was, and had been, ill done. She was getting nothing from her wealth, she had no knowledge of how to handle it.

But, somehow, his spirits rose during that most indifferent of plain luncheons. He could teach her so

much, and she was so teachable. It was characteristic of him to lose sight of the ultimate, and to be suddenly in good spirits from no apparent cause.

While the servants were in the room he talked to her about his travels. He had been everywhere, seen everything, he talked with amazing brilliancy. She was enthralled by the vivid pictures he gave her.

"I have had experiences, bad times. I was stranded in New York when I was twenty-one, with five dollars in my pocket, and without a friend. That is when I became versed in palmistry." He omitted to tell her about the opera singer with whom he had travelled.

He told her how he had given his five dollars, one by one, for lessons in the art of palmistry, how he had rapidly become a professor, and set up for himself. He told her how he had bamboozled his landlord into furnishing his rooms, and a newspaper manager into giving him credit for advertisements. He made her laugh with the description of his first client, and of some of the others. How they gradually instructed him in the art of telling fortunes by the questions they asked, the leads they gave him. He loved that low infectious laugh of hers, he brought it out again and again. He had forgotten how high-spirited he had been as a boy, the things he had done. But, diving about in his memory, or drawing on his invention, he entertained her endlessly.

At length, they were alone in the room. The coffee tray was before her, and the liqueurs before him; a mile of table, or so it seemed, separated them.

"May I come over there? I feel I have to shout you my adventures."

He took his liqueur over with him, he drew his chair near hers, he even helped her with the coffee-making.

Norman had been particular about his coffee, and this was a German machine, a complicated arrangement of glass and metal.

"Fred gave us this," she said, in explaining how it was to be used.

"Oh! Bother Fred," he exclaimed, as he scalded his fingers in turning it over. "I knew, I felt that he was my enemy! I beg your pardon, but I've burnt my fingers."

She was full of concern, she even took his hand to see where it had been burnt, she was moved to distress. And Errington Welch-Kennard revelled in her soft touch and sympathy, and began to tell her so, his strange eyes fixed a little too tenderly, perhaps, upon her anxious face; for a man cannot change his habits quickly.

It was just that moment, just that inauspicious moment, that Fred Darcy chose to walk unannounced into the dining-room. He had had the freedom of the house since he was a boy.

Berenice dropped the hurt hand quickly, in confusion. Errington showed himself master of that, or any, situation.

"How do you do, Mr. Darcy; excuse my not shaking hands with you. This kettle of yours is rather complicated. I was trying to turn it upside down for Mrs. Darcy, she tells me it has to go upside down as soon as it boils; when it boiled over I wasn't quick enough for it!"

Fred was stiff and awkward in his expression of regret, in his greeting to them both. But Errington, wrapping the handkerchief round his hurt hand, went on talking rapidly.

"What a lucky chance you came in. I was hoping for an opportunity for a few words with you before our official meeting. May we ask, do you think we may ask, Mrs. Darcy to have her coffee taken upstairs, to leave us to each other for a little?"

She rose at once.

"Shall I send you down some salve? The pain of a scald is so bad."

He held the door open for her.

"No! No! It is very kind of you, but it is nothing, nothing at all."

"How they adore the opportunity of making a fuss, these women," he said to Fred, when she had gone, dropping easily into a chair. "I look upon it as a lucky chance you came in just then. I dislike ambulance work being practised upon me. Now I shall be able to hear your news. It seems to me—" and he went into rapid detail of the original partnership deed.

Fred had been startled at seeing them together, so close together. But he too had no experience, or knowledge, to bring to bear against Welch-Kennard's tact and diplomacy.

Of course, Fred knew the importance of his own views on every subject. But it was not unflattering that this man, so much older, should have been struck, in their very first interview, by the value and weight of his opinions.

"Women and business are really incompatible," said Welch-Kennard again, presently. "It is almost impossible to get Mrs. Norman Darcy to realise the value of money, the meaning of figures——"

"Oh! but my-cousin's wife is not unintelligent. I am sure I could make her understand."

"My dear fellow—I am sure *you* could. I don't pretend to your gifts."

The "dear fellow" seemed rather a liberty. Fred resented any one taking a liberty with him. But Errington Welch-Kennard understood the type with which he had to deal, and played up to it. Before they had finished their conversation, before the partners, and the clerk with the black bag, had arrived, and the serious business of the afternoon had commenced, Errington had succeeded in wiping out of Fred's memory the scene he had surprised; he had been able to imprint indelibly on Fred's mind, how highly he esteemed him. It was so "correct" of him to have insisted on Mrs. Darcy having her own representative, but it was almost unnecessary, in view of his, Fred's, exceptional fair-mindedness and acumen! This was the tone the lawyer adopted.

Fred was ashamed he had had a momentary pang, a passing suspicion, on his entry. It wronged Mrs. Norman Darcy's recent widowhood. He thought that, when, not only his interview with her lawyer, but the meeting of all of them, in the library, had come and gone. All the lead had been left to him, it was he who had explained everything to the meeting. And, because he was so good at explaining, and had so remarkable a gift of lucidity and clear expression, Mr. Welch-Kennard had asked him to enlighten Berenice, also, as to what was being done.

Fred saw her in the drawing-room. The flush, the welcome that greeted him, misled him. He did not know it was to an unanswered expectation he owed them.

Barely two months widowed, her eyes were already glowing and soft, as if from some inner light, and the

same light illumined her skin, which was dazzling against her black dress.

No thought of his had ever wronged her purity. Norman Darcy had been more than a father to him, had educated him, paid for his articles, pushed him forward. He had encouraged the intimacy between his young cousin and his young wife. Fred had read into Norman's kindness and encouragement his belief that it was to him, this young kinsman, he would entrust her, when the time, the inevitable time, came, that she would need a guardian.

He told her now, as he had promised Welch-Kennard he would, all that had passed at the meeting. It seemed there was a question as to how one clause of the old agreement should be interpreted, and, although he, Fred, quite saw her lawyer's point of view, he could not permit the partners to accept it without mature reflection. They were going to draw up a case for counsel, and, on the result, they would decide whether to go to arbitration, or take it into court as a friendly lawsuit. It was a nice point, a very nice point, as to whether——

But here she interrupted him.

"Isn't he coming up? Isn't Mr. Welch-Kennard going to explain things to me himself?"

"He had an appointment; he seems to be a busy man. But able, I must say, very able, and if he convinces us that you are to remain a partner, that we must either pay you out, or continue to pay Norman's share to you as Norman's executrix, you will certainly be in his debt."

Berenice cloaked her disappointment, cloaked it ill, to any one more skilled than Fred Darcy in reading women's looks. She was quiet, abstracted, as Fred lingered; the only subject to which she brought him back,

again and again, was as to his opinion of Welch-Kennard's abilities. She even pretended to doubt them, so that she might hear again how he had impressed Fred. And Fred could afford to be generous. His last lingering doubt had vanished when Welch-Kennard, after a brilliantly conducted battle on her behalf, had pressed Fred to save him going upstairs, by conveying to her the result of their consultation.

"I don't think you could have put yourself in better hands," he said deliberately. All the Darcys were slow of speech, deliberate; and Fred, being young, rather accentuated the family manner. He put accurate thought into rounded phrase, and mouthed it with the Balliol intonation.

How he bored her, as he sat on, in the afternoon, and talked, always talked, with that monotonous intoning. How it contrasted with the morning, the lunch-time, the time that she had hoped to repeat.

"You must not allow yourself to grow low-spirited, to get depressed," Fred said, when at length he got up to go. "I will come round as often as I can—you will consider that point I was suggesting, about having some one to live with you, some nice woman, Gertrude Darcy, for instance?"

"Oh! no, no, Fred. I don't want any one to live with me." She was dismayed at the prospect.

He pressed the point a little urgently. It offended the Darcy code that even he should be able to come in and find her alone, in the twilight, in the evening hours. Even whilst he realised how pleasant the prospect, how easy the road would be made to that castle in Spain he was building so carefully, with such rigid attention to detail, he realised also that it was not quite the thing; for she was so young.

"Well, I'll think it over. I'll let you know; and Fred—don't bother to come over often. I'm going to be fearfully busy, and I am going to carry out all Norman's wishes and schemes, I am going to keep up all his correspondence——"

"But you will be very careful. You will not commit yourself to any promises, not without due consideration and consultation." Fred took alarm.

"Oh! I promise you that. I will do nothing without consultation." If Fred and she had different consultants in view it could not be helped.

"And I am going to do something of my own, something in memory of him. I want to think it over, to work out the idea."

She reddened; she spoke with some hesitation. Of what was she thinking her days might be full, why was she arranging for solitude, and uninterrupted afternoons and evenings? She might deceive Fred, she could not deceive herself.

Fred Darcy thought she showed the right feeling. He interpreted her hesitation, her blushes, to his own satisfaction. Until she made up her mind to a chaperon, to have some nice woman to live with her, he must not come too often. He must leave her the twelve months of her widowhood, the decorous twelve months of her mourning and solitude.

Ah! how glad she was to get rid of him to-day! His cold and bony hand! if it pressed hers ever so gently, she returned the pressure with warmth. She was so glad to get rid of him.

"Good-bye, dear Fred, good-bye. Don't bother about me, I shall not be a bit dull; I am never dull when I am alone."

CHAPTER IV

SHE had her happy weeks for dreaming, she was left undisturbed.

Errington Welch-Kennard came back to her that evening, on some pretext of business, some detail of which he had forgotten to inform Fred. Also he wanted to return her handkerchief, and to tell her his hand was all right.

In the days, the weeks, that followed the pretexts were never lacking. Their friendship, their intimacy, progressed apace. He got an insight into a nature wholly sweet, an intelligence not below the average, an innocence of the world and of evil almost incredible. She got strange glimpses into new worlds where men and women suffered, through each other, of paradises where they met and lingered; dazzling short glimpses he gave her.

He came and went, he came and stayed away. He filled the house with flowers. No one had ever sent her flowers before. He wrote her short notes when he did not come. No one had ever written her such notes before. He called her "child." The word was as a caress, it lingered always in her ears. He lavished, or so it seemed to her, great gifts of sympathetic hours, of reminiscence and confidence, of magnetic hand-presures. Once, perhaps more than once, a kiss unwarranted, dropped on her hand, on her hair. And his eyes kissed her often.

One night he stayed late. He forgot for that evening, just for one hour of that one evening, that she was so young, so inexperienced, that she was his client and the position was untenable. He forgot that he was world-stained, unfit, in difficulties, that he had resolved to abstain from this temptation, at least. That evening in abandonment, he played for her a strange symphony. She was bewildered and entranced by the intoxicating music that he played to her, all unstrung by the melody of it. Her dawning womanhood glowed and brightened at the vibration of the strings, as he touched them. Her depths were stirred by the inspiration of each successive episode in the music. He was lonely. In the wail of the minor key she saw it was his mate for which his spirit yearned. Now she was charmed again by the adagio. To the soft obligato of the violins she sang the swan-song of her happy maidenhood. There was nothing of her that he had not moved. She found his lips on her lips!

Before she realised in that exquisite instant of response that it was indeed love that had come to her, he was gone!

And then, hours afterwards, his letter was brought to her.

"I dare not see you again as I saw you to-night. Surround me with difficulties, child, barricade yourself against me. 'Do we move of ourselves, or are we moved by an unseen hand at a game?' I can't trust myself with you, with your dark eyes, and the red lips that part and soften and smile sometimes as I talk, the little hands I kiss! Child, I am all amazed and bewildered by you, or by myself! Your soul, so white, shines like

stars in your eyes' soft depths. What have I, with a child's soul? Your tremulous lips—did I kiss them to-night? I did not dare, tell me I did not dare; all my pulses are throbbing at the thought. Oh! why are you so good, why am I so unworthy! Tyrant, you absorb me—I shall throw you and your affairs into Chancery! Now you are smiling, I see it, your sweet smile! Write and ask me to forgive you; you fill my days and spoil my nights. How dare you so disturb me?"

She grew, in the time that followed, to something like comprehension of him. Although he was never twice alike, although he broke almost as many appointments as he made, changed from lover to lawyer, and from lawyer to lover, in a way that hurt her pride, and bruised her sensitiveness, she began to understand him, to accept suffering from his hands, to see, in humility, her woman's place.

The days of her widowhood were so recent; that was part of the explanation she gave to herself. But what he evoked filled her days and nights. Sitting by the fire-side on idle mornings, on empty afternoons, she was always listening for one step, dreaming but of one face. Driving in her brougham through the London streets, wrapped in fur, solitary, silent, in passing figures, in crowds or empty side-streets, she saw but one face.

One curious afternoon she met him in Hans Crescent. Sybil had written to her to come, for they had not met since Norman's death. One whimsical reason after another Sybil had given to excuse herself from the visit of condolence. In truth, she and her Apollo had been constantly together these last few months, and she had

perforce to let events take their course. Now, although, the unnatural brilliance of her eyes, the dead pallor of her skin, and her languid movements, told of exhaustion, she was alive again for the nonce, and keen to hear how matters had progressed.

"How sweet of you to come and see me," she began; she could not admit that she had been ill. "I ought to have gone to you, but I had a bound MS. of the 'Contra Gentes,' by Athanasius of Alexandria, brought me, a facsimile of the one in the Egerton collection, the edges gilt and gaufered—the roundels copper-gilt! There! I don't want to make you madly jealous, but I could not leave it, it was literally impossible for me to tear myself away."

She went into details of the binding, she had the technicalities at her finger-ends.

"You forgive my not going out under the circumstances; you would have been the same, wouldn't you? And now, how have you been getting on? I want to hear all about it, everything."

Berenice's education had not included old Italian bindings; she would not have been jealous if Sybil had acquired the national collection. She had been shocked at Sybil's pallor and evident exhaustion, but knew enough of her idiosyncrasy against the suspicion of ill-health to make no direct allusion to it.

"I am glad you have got something you care for," was her soft answer. This new love was widening her wide sympathies; now she wanted all the world to be happy. And it was the Sphinx who had given her happiness. She did not know what the "Contra Gentes" was, nor even, probably, who was Athanasius of Alexandria, but she was infinitely glad that the sick woman

should have what pleased her. She bent over her, and kissed her very tenderly.

But the Sphinx hated the note of sympathy in her voice, the tenderness of her kiss. Sybil wanted nothing from this girl but that she should be good to Errington, should give him herself, her fortune. She was impatient of her sympathy.

"Sit down, take off your gloves; can't you take off, too, that advertisement of a widow's bonnet! You must stay and tell me everything, all about it. What have you been doing? How far have you got?"

"Got?" echoed the other vaguely. They were not really intimates, she could not divine what the Sphinx was asking her. Had Errington told of her scheme for perpetuating Norman's memory? With a pang of dismay she remembered that she had taken no step in the matter. She answered quickly.

"Oh! I've drawn up a list of the subscriptions that I must keep up, and another of those that I should like to add, and Mr. Welch-Kennard . . ."

"Yes! yes! I know. But how about Welch-Kennard? That's the point. Have you fallen in love with him? But of course you have."

"Sybil—my mourning!"

Her breath was taken away, the sudden flush burned her, she could hardly speak. To bring her thoughts, the thoughts so sacred that she had not voiced them even to herself, into the crude daylight, was cruel, impossible. "My mourning—" she faltered.

"Oh! of course, of course. But if you were in green now, or blue, would you be in love with him? Isn't he a dear fellow? You haven't thanked me for giving him to you."

"He is—he has been very good to me."

Sybil laughed. The other, so near tears, put out her hand—

"Don't, dear, don't," she pleaded.

"Don't question you?"

"Norman! You know how good Norman was to me."

"Oh, yes! Poor Norman," the Sphinx replied quickly, "I am so sorry I forgot to send him a wreath. But I don't think he missed it." She went on laughing softly. She did not want Berenice to be sentimental about Norman Darcy; she wanted to hear, to know, what she and Errington had been about. "I can't help it, Berenice. Don't look so shocked. I was only thinking how funny Norman would look in a wreath. Of course, I know they don't wear them, but still——"

The image she conjured up, Berenice could not but see. The paralysis had affected poor Norman's face, it was drawn a little on one side. It was cruel of Sybil to make a jest of him. Her face showed her feelings.

"Tell me some more about your books, your prints; I like to hear you talk about such things," she said hastily.

"No. I want to hear about you and Errington."

The colour flamed again in her cheeks.

"There is nothing to hear," she answered shortly.

"Well, is he a good lawyer?" asked Sybil mischievously. How that child was blushing, surely, it was all right for Errington; who could resist him? He was much too good for her.

"Is he a good lawyer?" she asked again.

"I believe—yes—I think Messrs. Darcy, Fred Darcy—we all . . . think him a very clever lawyer."

She was confused and uncertain, she had not yet recovered from the shock of Sybil's question:

Was she in love with him?

She knew, she had known, since yesterday. And his letter even now was resting against her heart. But she could not speak of it, of him; it was only for herself, this wonderful secret. The Sphinx saw through her, saw right through her.

"I see it all—I see it all—you are madly in love with him. You don't want to tell me, but I can see it, read it," she exclaimed triumphantly.

"I will go—I will go if you talk like that," Berenice said desperately. Tears were in her eyes, in her voice. "It—it isn't fair. He has said nothing—there is nothing——"

"And that is all you will tell me? I, who arranged it so beautifully, who gave him to you." She was disappointed at not being made a *confidante*, and accentuated her disappointment so that Berenice might be moved. She had been sitting up, now she lay down among her pillows.

"He is my best, my greatest friend, and I gave him to you. I sent him away from me. I thought you, and he, would have come to tell me before now."

"There is nothing to tell, there is really nothing to tell."

Berenice was all hurried, she heard a step on the stair; both of them heard it. She could not keep her heart from bounding at the sound of that step, nor the fluctuating, betraying colour from flooding her cheeks. She was beside Sybil again, in confusion, apology, farewell.

Sybil caught her dress, detained her.

"Why don't you tell me? I see it, I saw it, for myself. There is no one in the world like him, you can't sleep for thinking of him; I read it all in your eyes. You made an appointment here——"

"No, no. Let me go, Sybil, I——"

"I sha'n't. I want to see you together. Has he got over the fact that you have too much money? He is so proud."

Was it *that* between them? Berenice's heart leaped, she had not thought of that. Was that perhaps why he came, and went, came, and stayed away, tortured her?

She was grateful to Sybil for the suggestion, she bent again to kiss her.

Now he was in the room. For the moment, she could not see him, the room was dark before her, and she could not see him. It was only last night he had kissed her. Still on her lips she felt the soft heat of his, still about her shoulders she felt the close dear pressure of his arms. His letter lay upon her heart.

To-day, to-day again all was changed. But she had the clue, Sybil had given her the clue, it was not only her recent widowhood, it was her wealth! Ah! now she could hear his changed voice and manner.

Errington had had time to prepare himself, he had recognised her liveries outside the house. As he himself would have put it, he was not going to give himself away!

"I've been engaged on your business nearly all day, Mrs. Darcy!" he said, after his cool friendly greeting to them both. But it was difficult for him to avoid seeing the deep flush, and then the pallor; the wide eyes, full of wonder that, after last night, he could greet her so, the hurt look. What a child she was in intrigue!

"Figure to yourself, Sphinx, your poor Errington up to his neck in legal technicalities, fighting to give this young lady another thousand or two on to an income which, as it is, is much too large for her to know how to spend."

"You should help her to spend it; I dare say you would not find it difficult," said Sybil maliciously.

He broke into a short laugh, but Berenice said "Good-bye," hurriedly.

"I must be going," she said, "I have an appointment. Don't get up, Sybil." But again the Sphinx held on to her, detained her.

"No, no, don't go yet. Tea is coming up in a minute."

"I must."

She was desperate to get away. It was impossible to be in the room with him like this; she could hardly bear it. She could not meet his eyes, or Sybil's. He had no words for her; had he forgotten last night? She gave him, too, a hurried farewell. But, as he held the door open for her, he asked in a low voice, his eyes meeting hers:

"Are you going straight home? Will you be in at six?"

The Sphinx, watching him from the sofa, smiled quietly to herself. When he came back, and threw himself into the low chair, and sighed, she asked him mockingly:

"Well! *Will* she be at home at six?"

"Oh! so you heard that, did you?"

"Of course. How much longer for the *dénouement*? I am getting impatient, we all are."

"All!" He raised his eyebrows inquiringly, bringing his thoughts back with difficulty to her.

"Oh, yes!" she said easily. "I've told them all about it, I've warned off Scott-Brooking and I've encouraged the others to console him by making a book on the result. They are laying six to four on your proposing within the month, even money within the next two."

"Don't, Sphinx, don't." He got up and walked about the room restlessly. "It jars—the thing is not as simple as it looks. I'm in a sort of fiduciary position towards her. She is very attractive, of course——"

"Can't you make up your mind?" she asked him curiously.

Whatever dislike he might have felt to satisfying her curiosity, he knew there was no help for it. He continued to walk about the room, touching this or the other ornament, commenting upon them with a casual word or two, for he also was a connoisseur. She let him take his own time, and at last he broke out into speech.

"I have fallen in love with her; that's the whole of it, that's the truth of it. I haven't a shadow of excuse; she is twenty years younger than I am, and a hundred years less experienced. The sweetness, the sheer good goodness of her, appals me. I see her at needlework,—she belongs to some guild where they make clothes for the poor—I see her bending over it, while she draws little pictures to herself, to *me*, of the women, the children, who will wear the clothes, who will be warmed, and grateful, and glad that some one was so thoughtful of them. Oh! God! Sphinx, and to think of me, of the life I've led, of the things I know. And it isn't only that; it isn't only her sweet soul, the charity and pitifulness of her. Sometimes there are flashes of brilliant intelligence, sometimes I seem to see the rarest nature, depth and womanliness. And I am such a beast!

I can't alter; sometimes I see only her hair, her eyes, or that slender undeveloped figure, all grace and youth. . . ."

He groaned, he took up a bowl that lay on the vitrine; it was a jade, exquisitely carved. "Thank Heaven, it's almost unbreakable," thought the Sphinx, for, true enough, he banged it down, in another minute, as if it were of no value. It was of no value to him at the moment.

"Then there's that damned eight thousand a year. Money is no use to me, you know that well enough, except to give away, or spend on women. I can't do that with hers, can I? To let myself go, to take her, well, you know what I mean, it's so infernally mean. It's a child, a baby, hardly a woman at all, it doesn't know what it is looking at, and yet stretches out both hands for it. And I'm going on for forty. I've spent everything my father left me, and my income is hypothecated for God knows how many years.

"This is the only time, in all those thirty odd years, that you have held yourself back, isn't it?" she asked him, thoughtfully, reflectively.

"The only time! I begin to see that I have never lived, only wallowed, like a pig in a trough. I've always eaten when I've been hungry, drunk when I've been thirsty. And I have not altered, one does not alter. But now, although I'm starving, I can't eat. I have the strangest sinkings, fears, misgivings! Why is it, Sphinx?"

So, a great passion was coming to him! Odd, incredible, unbearable! And yet she had foreseen it. Strange, too, the pang that shot through her, the pang that was almost physical, that turned her lips white.

He noted her pallor. He had been good to her, always, incredibly good. He came over to her now, and stood beside her.

"Has it been bad lately?" he asked. "Poor Sybil! Poor Sphinx! And I am talking only of myself; thinking only of myself." He leant over her, he adjusted her pillow.

"Has it been bad, dear?"

She would not have his sympathy.

"Don't fuss over me. I am all right. Apollo has been a trifle more exacting than usual, that's all!" And yet it was difficult for her to speak.

"Ah! more exacting, has he? You had better have had me for a lover! We should not have quarrelled."

He saw she would not tell him how she suffered; that he must fall in with her mood, although he was all unstrung and unfit to play his part.

"Ah! but my Apollo is always sweet, and faithful, the exquisite agony of his supreme moments compensates me for all his encroachments and occasional waywardness. Don't talk about my love affairs, it's immoral, it's almost indecent. Go on telling me about yours."

The man, whatever his faults, had something of the tenderness and pitifulness of a woman; and to him, too, love brought sympathy. There was, perhaps, more in common between himself and Berenice than he knew. The tragedy on the sofa, the agony in the depths of Sybil's wonderful eyes, the brave aspect she wore in her long dying, moved him no less than it had moved his ladylove, moved him to disregard her wishes, to make an effort to get nearer to her.

"Can nothing be done for you, nothing?" he asked,

his voice husky, laying his hand caressingly on the pillow beside her, speaking with emotion. "Don't put me off, Sybil, you have denied yourself to me over and over again this last month. Have you seen a doctor?"

"Oh, yes," she answered lightly, but letting her cheek lie against his hand. "I saw a doctor, two, in fact. They ordered me something to drink; but the first bottle that came smelt so strangely that I think it must have been 'corked.' The second was certainly 'ullaged.' I like my own cellar best. You superintended the filling of that, you know. Perrier Jouet '89 suits me better than the stuff they ordered. Don't bother about me, Errington."

She pushed him away, mentally and physically. She would not let the conversation drift on to herself, and her state of health.

"How about you and Berenice? I'll show you my 'Contra Gentes' presently; that is why I denied myself to you. I was jealous of any one seeing it until I had all the details by heart, until I had made it really my own. You know I am always mad about these things, that is why I saw no one lately; there has been nothing more serious than that the matter with me. But now, tell me, tell me some more about yourself and Berenice. I knew she was the one woman in the world for you. She has all the possibilities and the true Rossetti lips and hair. You can make what you will of her. She is clever, too. The way, before she met you, that she fell in with Scott-Brooking's idea for the operetta, proved that to me, she would have written it admirably or at least Pitmanned it! She catches fire from an idea in a moment, she is only at the beginning of everything. Love will make or unmake her."

She had to stop in her enumeration of Berenice Darcy's virtues. She thought she was past sensitiveness, that all things were clear to her in the light that shone upon her now, at the end of the black tunnel that her life had been. She had crawled through the last few sections so slowly, and been glad only of the intervals of unconsciousness and surcease from pain. Parts of her were callous now against hurt. Yet she had to pause in telling him of Berenice's charms!

She was old, her charms had gone, her day was done. He had never been her lover, he had been only the one man she had ever loved.

He had been such a faithful friend, so unceasingly good to her, had given her what she wanted always, not as other men had done, but just what she wanted. He had effaced himself always, in a manly pitifulness, in a womanly tenderness, in a sympathy made intense by silence. She had leaned upon him, and he had never failed her; being not a rigid prop, but giving way, and bending, and letting her move as she listed, all his strength pliant to her mood. Looking back, she did not see how she could have lived through it all without him. She loved him. She was a dying woman, desperately tired of living, and there was nothing that she had to leave except this scapegrace of a lawyer, whose beautiful eyes had looked softly and sympathetically on all her misdeeds, on all her mistakes, who alone, of all her friends, of all whom she had known, had never been selfish nor forgetful, who had always understood, and never spoken.

She wanted to help him. The end might be nearer than he knew, and she wanted to help him before it came. She had learnt what was the best thing life has

to offer men and women, when the knowledge was too late to profit her. But he should profit.

"Why are you hesitating, undecided? Is it the fortune?"

"Partly, and partly her youth and inexperience. She knows so little, has seen nothing. I look at myself through other men's eyes; the world would call me a *roué*, an adventurer."

"But if she is in love with you?"

"She does not know the meaning of the word."

"Not of passion, perhaps."

"Oh! Yes, that is just it. For, if she knew me as I am——"

"Norma, Elsa Beethoven, Lady Helbert?"

"It's impossible, Sphinx, you see it's impossible. If she were not rich, now; if her husband's death had left her poor——"

"You would have told her you were a reformed character, you would have grown into a reformed character! But you could not have afforded to marry her, you know. You could have added her to your collection, but you could not have afforded matrimony if she had nothing!"

"Oh! Yes, that is just what I could have done; I could have settled down. I find I haven't forgotten my law, and they would be glad to have me more regularly at the office; Carker told me that. He could make some arrangement with my creditors. I told him everything about my liabilities. And we could have lived simply. She has the simplest tastes."

"But *you* have not."

"I could have acquired them."

"Omnibuses, underground railways, cheap clothes, }

the suburbs! I see it all. You couldn't have stood it, Errington, you don't know yourself."

"I could have done it all for her. You don't know the difference it makes. Oh! I know the jargon as well as you do. Are you still so sure Heseltine was right, that we've always called things by the wrong names, that bad is good, and good is bad, and pleasure is everything? But I'm in revolt, Sphinx. My life has been a waste, because I never sat at a woman's hearth, and saw her at homely needlework."

"Oh! what a decadence! What would Algernon have said?" she mocked, though his words made her never-sleeping pain active.

"He would have fouled it somehow, I've no doubt," he said brutally.

He hurt her for the first time. It was the first blow she had ever had from him, although all the world had struck at her. She found herself without speech or laughter as he went on.

"Whatever he did, or said, his genius made it seem right, possible, at the moment. No one knew the influence he wielded, and still wields, better than I do. But it was a devastating unnatural influence. I have been half-blind all these years— Have I hurt you? Have I hurt you?"

She had become suddenly pallid round the lips, grey. He was filled with remorse and self-accusation when he saw how terrible she looked, anguish personified sat in her wonderful eyes. To hold silence, to close the black curtain upon Algernon Heseltine's crimes, to keep the light shining, the bright perpetual light on his genius, to remember only the vivifying influence he had been to art, literature, poetry, drama, this had been all that

was left to her. Why did Errington word to her that it was delusive, *he*, who had stood by her side, and upheld her in her crusade, in all her mistaken loyalty and martyrdom?

"Forgive me, Sphinx, I am half mad with indecision, call it love, if you like. Dear, it isn't you, it isn't Alger-non, or the creed; it's myself. Don't tell me I have hurt you!"

"It's all right with me, it was nothing that you said, it was just a touch of pain, toothache, nothing." She lied heroically, and smiled bravely.

"But what are you supposed to have done, what makes you feel unfit to marry the widow of a city banker? Wasn't he a banker, Norman Darcy? You were not even a disciple. Your hedonism has always been conventional."

"Compared to her——"

"A man of forty to a woman of twenty-four!"

"But she is not like other women."

"Well!" she smiled at him, she began to know what she must do, "we must teach her better. If you won't, we must."

"Sybil!"

"Yes! that is the only way, I see it now. You go; go to Japan. They are all longing for you to leave the field clear!"

"You are trying to frighten me!"

"Frighten you! Don't be so absurd. You can't play dog in the manger. Woolley would like eight thousand a year on which to be cynical, he would know how to spend it, too. Don't you think so? He has exquisite taste! I should get my 'Paradise Lost' MS.!"

"If she should ever get to know of the things I have done! View them through those pure eyes!"

She could see she moved him, she could see him waver.

"We will take care of her for you. Apollo would see her through the first shock. For I'm afraid she cares for you, Errington, I'm afraid she cares. When we have taught her how to live, and laugh, to laugh at everything——"

"That sweet low laugh! No!"

"We will show her the 'Apotheosis of Saint Errington Welch-Kennard' in a blue kimono, in Japan, smoking opium with a geisha! That will help her to get over it. You told me of the incident, you remember."

"You—you think it is too late—you think she cares?"

"Don't let that worry you. Won't she have my Apollo?"

"Sphinx, you torture me. I'm torn with doubts. Lila Helbert has left her husband for good; she writes me daily. Elsa Beethoven is coming back to London; Norma drags at me for money. I am not fit, dear, you know I am not fit."

"No! dear, of course, you are not, you're too polyglot, too complex. The Darcy successor should be dull, argumentative. She would be better with a politician, Willoughby Woolley, M.P., bimetallist, for instance, or Scott-Brooking. Leave her to us."

She had recovered herself perfectly now, she knew what she must do for him. She went on talking, she applauded his resolution. He was quite right, he must not allow himself to be called a fortune-hunter; it was time he began to think of what men would say of him, it was different when he had been young. He had not cared what people said, when he championed Algernon's cause, and stood by her. It touched him when she remembered this. But he had suffered enough then, she

went on, he must not risk going through again what he had had to bear. She had not quite realised how greatly he craved the good opinion of the world; but he was quite right. If Berenice cared, had learnt to care for him, it was of no moment. The Sphinx would not lose sight of her.

"I will take care of her. She may be nervous, excitable, lonely at first, dear; but you must not think about that. Anyway she shall not suffer; I promise you that. They are very amusing, you know, you admit that,—all my young men, all the 'flat headed brigade,' as you used to call them. They will be such a variety for her, too, Woolley, for instance, and Brooking. And then there is Frank, she has not met Frank Dickinson, yet, nor Lord Belville. Don't worry about Berenice, Errington. If you feel you must, you ought to, go away from her, go right away. I promise you to look after her. What! you are not going——"

"I heard a ring, I can't stand these fellows to-day."

"Well, good-bye, then; good-bye, dear, dearest Errington. You are quite right, I see it clearly, so clearly now. You mustn't be accused of fortune-hunting. You can't fight the world all over again——"

She jested to the last, prodded him, tortured him where he was rawest. Not until he had flung himself out of the room, in uncontrollable irritation, in rage and distaste, could she feel that her work for him was being well done, could she lie back, and rest, and smile to herself with her white lips, and be satisfied, that at least she was doing what was best for him.

For, whatever she preached, she knew what was best, this poor wreck of a woman; she knew what she had missed.

CHAPTER V

OF course, Sybil had known by what arguments to move him.

Just so young as Berenice, less beautiful, perhaps, but with a more coruscating wit and intellect, better born, better bred, had that poor Sybil been, when first she was dazzled by the genius of Algernon Heseltine, the man who had invested corruption with such pure poetry that press and public alike were blinded for a time to its tendency. His brilliancy, his eccentricities, were the talk of the hour when he came up from Oxford, having gilded his name with the Newdigate, and established a record in the schools. But soon, very soon, a whisper about him spread like a leprosy through the town; before it had time to become a roar of execration, he had made his defiant marriage. It was a quagmire into which she sank, a morass! Through the subtle poison he distilled there was nothing of her but was defiled.

Within a few years of their marriage came the public shame, the public crucifixion; for her the end of all things, but humiliation. And once she had been so proud!

Errington knew, for, indeed, she had reminded him, that if Algernon Heseltine was dead, there were, even in this very set that gathered around the Sphinx, as flies around a carcass, men of the same tastes, the same perverted instincts, the same desires.

Scott-Brooking, now! It was Scott-Brooking who had taken Berenice Darcy to Hans Crescent. The young musician, with his coarse, ugly face, colossal vanity, his loose lips and talk, had spent an evening in her company before he, Welch-Kennard, had ever met her. Some attraction he must have had for her, or why had she attempted the lyric, discussed the libretto? It were idle to deny the attraction of the unknown for even the purest woman!

And those other friends of Sybil's! Frank Dickinson, for instance, who talked brilliantly, wrote novels full of exotic humour, who had a head like a Greek god, a figure like a young athlete, and the ambitions of a Marie Corelli! Willoughby Woolley, grey-haired before he was thirty, with lines about the eyes, and fluent venom on his easy tongue! Were these better friends for Berenice than himself? Was it from them he would leave her to choose a more fitting mate? To go away, to leave her to whatever fate might befall her, did not appear to him so noble a thing to do, when he thought of it, as Sybil had intended that he should, from any point of view but the purely personal one.

Men would call him an adventurer, a fortune-hunter, if he took advantage of his position as her legal adviser to marry his inexperienced client. He would suffer in his own self-esteem and conscience, nevertheless, if, for this reason, and for this alone, he left her to what might betide. If Sybil Heseltine carried out her promise—or was it a threat?—Berenice would be exposed to danger, if not to degradation. He had no illusions about poor Sybil, or the set she gathered around her. Berenice might escape; in the innermost depths of his heart he thought she would escape, for all the instincts of

his ladylove were pure, and wholesome. He thought she was too healthy, in every sense of the word, for morphia, for instance, to be an attraction. But, would he not be evading his responsibilities, those self-assumed responsibilities, which to him, at least, had always been so much stronger than any that the world would have credited him with, in leaving her fate to chance? By going abroad he would secure an escape from the imbroglios that threatened him from many quarters, but he would hardly escape the haunting memory of the first woman he had cared for too much to ask her for herself, he would hardly escape the remembrance that he had left her in what he knew to be a perilous position. Young, rich, beautiful, and Sybil Heseltine her friend!

Yet the days, the weeks, went by without bringing him to a decision. Duns, writs, actual shortage of cash pulled him up when he was on the eve of deciding that he and he alone could and would make the happiness of Berenice's future. Some little well-considered note of Sybil's sent him, now by one, now by another, of her myrmidons, unsettled him when again he had decided that he was not fit to be Berenice's husband.

Sybil, understanding him so well, cognisant of his position, believing that this marriage would be for his good, sent him little prods and pin-pricks of suggestion, repeated to him ribald jests she had heard, and wagers that had been made, begged him again and again not to worry about Berenice, assured him that she would carry out her promise to be a friend to Berenice!

She made his loyalty to her bleed, she almost turned his comprehension and his pity to repugnance. But she knew what she had to do for him, and she did not flinch!

Meanwhile, Berenice waited with heart-sinking and

fears, with hope and happy expectancy, for the hours that brought, or failed to bring, him to her. He told her in a hundred subtle ways that he cared for her, but he never asked her whether one day she would be his wife. Sometimes she thought he loved her only as a father, as a brother, even as a confidential lawyer; but, when this was what she thought, she awoke to know she but played the sophist with herself. For he had taught her agony, ecstasy, and these things are not what one learns from father, brother, friend! His visits and his absences, his demands, his lack of them, tore and tortured her pride. In travail her womanhood was born, and there was none but he could soothe her pain, and bring it to happy climax and cry.

The day came when he heard that counsel's opinion had been given in her favour in the matter of her remaining interest in the business. The news was conveyed in a letter from Fred Darcy, saying that Messrs. Darcy Bros. had decided not to carry the case any further, but intended to offer her a capital sum in satisfaction of her claim, as soon as they had had time to work out the figures.

His partner, to whom he passed the letter silently, congratulated him heartily on the result. Indeed, he was conscious of having conducted the whole negotiations with ability. He knew it was not likely that any one but himself would have succeeded so expeditiously and well in carrying through so complicated a matter. He quite realised the magnanimity of Darcy Bros., but it was he who had shown them the way.

Whether to woo her, or not, whether to wed her, or not, he was still undecided. That the wooing had been going on all the time he hardly realised, at least, he had

not defined it to himself; but, as her lawyer, his conscience was more than clear. He had been of use to her, the letter proved it; and he ran with it lightly upstairs, when he got to Prince's Gate, almost like a boy, notwithstanding his forty years and thirteen stone, to tell her of the news.

He had not dreamed she would not be alone just this one afternoon. For, after all, it was Fred Darcy, and not Sybil Heseltine, who precipitated the crisis, who exasperated him to unconsidered action, who scattered his good or bad resolutions, and made havoc of his plans.

He had expected to find her alone; he had pictured the room, the woman, the hour. The room, with its gilded modern furniture upholstered in red damask, with its ormolu candelabra, console tables, and high mirrors, the 1860 drawing-room, was as he already knew it.

The woman, too, he had pictured well; she met all his expectancy. Some weeks since, she had discarded, at his desire, the cap and collar, and other insignia of her widowhood. She had a skin that could stand even unrelieved black, and it was in black she was this afternoon, just as he had expected, an afternoon gown, flowing and soft, outlined with sable at throat and wrist. She had learnt to dress, since it was for him she arrayed herself. Her head was exquisitely set on her slender figure, the firelight brought out the red gleams in her hair.

She was standing up when he came in; he saw there was more colour than usual in her cheeks, more fire in her dark eyes; her soft lips, too, were tremulous. She was evidently in the throes of some emotion; to him it gave the impression of anger, or indignation, although he hardly knew her capable of either. And in front of

the fire, his back to it, in the most characteristic of British attitudes, stood Fred Darcy, intrusive, unnecessary Fred. His face was less readable than Berenice's, but he made it immediately obvious that he resented the unannounced entry of the other, whose greeting he hardly acknowledged.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come," she exclaimed. "What a long time you have stayed away! It is two whole days since I have seen you. I was afraid something had happened to you."

She was accentuating the warmth of her greeting! Where was the shyness with which she usually met him, the exquisite tremble and doubt?

What had Fred Darcy said to her? Errington's conscience was not so clear, but that the query flashed at once into his brain.

"Have you missed me? I am glad you have missed me." He would not be behind her in warmth.

He had felt Fred, before this, antagonistic in the background. Well, now he must come out into the open. Welch-Kennard threw down the glove boldly.

"I am surprised to find you here before me, Mr. Darcy. Have you told her——"

"I don't believe anything he tells me, I don't believe anything he said," she burst out impulsively.

She held out both hands to Errington, and he took them. A glimmer of the truth came to him.

"And what has he been telling you? What is it you won't believe, dear child?"

"I have no objection to repeating to Mr. Kennard what I have told you," said Fred. "Do you want me to? Do you want to hear him admit it before you? I have said nothing I cannot prove. You had better

leave us, Berenice, I warn you, you had better leave us. I would prefer to deal with Mr. Welch-Kennard alone."

To deal with him! Just the phrase Fred would use! Errington burst out laughing, still holding the girl's hands, stooping to her a little.

"Do you want to leave us, dear? Are you afraid to hear what he has to say to me?"

"I am not afraid." She looked at him quite steadily. He did not know how much of a woman she had grown since she had learnt to love him.

"I don't believe anything he has told me, but if it were all true . . ." (How beautiful her colour was, and the light in her eyes as she looked at him!) "it would make no difference. You are my—my friend. Norman always said our friends are themselves, not what we would have them, but our friends always."

She quoted Norman with a certain dignity, justifying herself thereby. Yet her eyes had an appeal in them.

He was sorry for her. He stopped and kissed each little hand he held, first one, then another, and sighed; he was sorry for her. He forgot to be sorry for Fred, he drove poor Fred near to desperation as he stood there with her, and kissed her hands, and waited almost without interest to hear what accusations would be brought against him. He knew the world wagged a bitter tongue about him. But it was only with himself he had to reckon. And now she had heard it, and disbelieved it! poor child!

His eyes were soft when he loosed her hands, when he faced Fred.

"And what have you to say about me, Mr. Darcy? Have I mismanaged this dear child's affairs? Is it of

the settlement we have arrived at, at last, that you have been complaining to her?"

"It was not about the settlement," Fred said, stiffly, "you know that well enough."

And it had not been.

In his club-room the night before Fred had heard a story about Errington Welch-Kennard. He had spent the morning verifying it. During his inquiries he had heard not one such story, but many. He had hastened to Prince's Gate with his knowledge; he had been convinced it was only necessary to give Mrs. Norman Darcy a hint that her solicitor's moral character was not beyond reproach. He had felt sure that she would at once put the whole matter in his hands, that she would desire him to take her papers and business away from Mr. Welch-Kennard, that she would be horrified, and alarmed that she had ever permitted his acquaintance. Of course, he did not know, he had not guessed, how far that acquaintance had been carried. Never, except on that one occasion, had he seen them together. He thought of Welch-Kennard only as her lawyer.

But instead of meeting him with horror at Welch-Kennard's misdeeds, with gratitude for the trouble he had taken in exposing them, she had received his first hint with indignation and exasperating incredulity. When he had persisted, for that he knew was his duty, she had flamed into anger! He had never seen her so moved. Even from the first moment she had startled him by her attitude. But at first, just for the first moment, he had not suspected the cause.

By the time she had goaded him into saying:

"But the man is a blackguard. You ought never to have been allowed to meet him; I can't think how Nor-

man permitted it," she had sufficiently lost her temper to bring all his ruined castles crumbling about his ears. Passionately she exclaimed:

"I don't believe a word against him, I won't hear, or believe, a word against him. I know him better than anybody else does, and I know there is no one like him. I am glad, I am proud, that he is my friend! Oh! yes, I am proud that he is my friend!"

She had taken his breath away, and he had not had time to calm himself, amidst the din and dust of that razed castle, before the man himself was in the room, and she had challenged him to bring his accusation.

"Well, Mr. Darcy, I am waiting," said Welch-Kennard calmly, "what is the charge?" He did not appear to feel the tension under which the other two were labouring.

"Mrs. Darcy is my cousin's widow. I am her nearest male relative."

A patchy red showed in Fred Darcy's sallow cheek; it was all that showed outwardly of his beating heart, and the shock of his slain hopes. Fred did not lack courage, though, perhaps, it had never been highly tried. But, to accuse the other of the things he had heard about him, who faced him there so cool and apparently unconcerned, whilst she stood by with flushed cheek and pride in the man, and unconcealed advocacy, tried both his own strength and courage, in this first hour of his trouble.

"I thought it my duty to make her aware of what I had heard concerning you," he said, struggling for his dignity.

"Concerning me?"

"Concerning you!"

"Well! out with it. Let me know what I have to meet. What it is that you have heard?"

"I don't think I should be asked to discuss such things before Mrs. Norman Darcy," he said, doggedly. There was red before his eyes, and their figures were dim.

"My dear fellow, I understood that was the very thing you were doing when I came in."

How dare he call him "my dear fellow." Fred's anger got the better of his other emotions.

"I beg your pardon, I did not tell her, nor did I intend telling her, half of what I had heard. I thought it would be sufficient for me to let her know men's judgment of you, and of your financial position. I told her there were half a dozen writs out against you, there are bills and acceptances of yours all over London; she refused to believe it. I added that your reputation with women was notorious."

Welch-Kennard remained absolutely cool. He actually put out his hand again, and said to Berenice:

"Did it make you unhappy to hear that I was such a villain?"

To see her look at him, to see her give him her hand, and keep her hand in his, was too much for Fred's endurance.

"I told her I heard you had been a professional palmist!"

"That was not great news to you, was it—dear?"

The way they smiled at each other, in mutual confidence, leaving him outside, rubbed off even the thick Balliol veneer.

"I have not yet told her that you were responsible for the separation between Mrs. Beethoven and her

husband, and that you will be the co-respondent in Sir William Helbert's coming divorce suit."

Errington dropped her hand, and spoke quickly.

"What's that? Is Helbert going for a divorce? Surely not! Surely I should have heard it if they were making me co-respondent? Come, young man!" He came towards him—the sense of his size and strength could not but strike Fred.

"We shall have to have this out. Who gave you that last bit of information?"

Fred maintained his ground well, although his lips lost their colour.

"Perhaps I should not have used the word 'co-respondent,'" he said stiffly.

"Ah! I thought there must be some mistake somewhere."

But Fred was not cowed, only taken at a disadvantage, and by surprise.

"The difference is only in degree," he went on, Balliol again, and argumentative. "Sir William Helbert is a Roman Catholic, and therefore divorce is out of the question with him. But his wife was in Italy with you last summer, and on that account he has turned her out of his home, and deprived her of the custody of her children. It seemed to me my duty"—he was still, he would always be, something of a prig, but he knew, and felt, he was fighting a losing battle, for a lost cause, and that his dreams were all faded, and that what had been best in his life had gone out of it for ever—"it seemed to be my duty, having heard these reports, and verified them, to urge Mrs. Norman Darcy to have nothing more to do with you, to take her affairs out of your hands at once."

"And to put them into yours?"

It was a mean rejoinder. Errington was sorry as soon as he had said it, almost before he had finished saying it. He hurried on:

"But, admit for the sake of argument, Mr. Darcy, that I am in debt, that I have been, or shall be, correspondent in half a dozen divorce suits, and a professional palmist, admit all your accusations to be justified, do you think the facts prove me any less efficient as a lawyer?"

"You are not fit to sit down in her presence."

It was true.

For a moment his shield went down, and just as he had seen the entreaty in her eyes, so now she saw the pain in his.

"It would make no difference," she said again. "Nothing would make any difference," she repeated, with desperate desire to drive away the pain she saw in his eyes.

"Sweetheart!" he said, softly, under his breath; but he meant her to hear it. It thrilled through her; she would have died for him.

He put up his shield again, he must fight this fellow. For her sake he must not let Fred Darcy go away and think he had been afraid to face him, and all he might have to say.

The fellow should say it, and then go. He and Berenice would be alone.

She had said it would make no difference! He would tell her all, everything, then she should decide. The very thought that it was she who must decide stirred his blood like wine. To-day, this afternoon, soon, he would tell her everything; then from her he would ac-

cept his destiny, whether to go or stay. What would matter to him anything the world said of him, if she wanted him to stay? She was not a child, but a woman, and her own future and his he would put into her hands. He was exhilarated, uplifted, he could go on now, he was almost arrogant now.

"Go on," he said, "go on; I am not fit to sit down in her presence! I admit that—no man of the world is fit to sit, as an equal, in the presence of a good woman. But what next? Is that all, or have you anything further to bring against me?"

"At this very moment there is an opera singer by the name of Lorna——"

"Why don't you get your facts right, man? The lady's pseudonym is 'Norma,'" he answered quickly, contemptuously. "Let him get through, and go," was all that was in Errington's mind now. What mattered what the fellow said? He would tell Berenice himself everything, then let her choose.

"She is living under your protection."

"No more than she is under yours! Anything else?"

"Get on, get on," he was saying under his breath. He would tell her all, everything! In an hour he would know what she would say to him, how she would take it, as soon as Fred had finished, and gone. What a prig the fellow was! What an ass!

"You tried to get Algernon Heseltine out of the country," continued Fred, doggedly.

Now they were coming to closer quarters; this was the point, this would always be the point.

"True, I did. I admit it. I tried to save the newspapers all that garbage, and the country from convicting as a common felon one of the most brilliant scholars

of the day, one of the finest intellects, misguided, doubtless, an evil influence, I allow, but a genius, notwithstanding. I should have been proud to have saved, not him, but England, from the disgrace of murdering in gaol, along with the lowest malefactors, a poor moral invalid, leper, if you will, but one needing a hospital, not a prison. Yes; it is true, I tried to get Algernon Heseltine away. I wish to God I had succeeded."

"And ever since then you have been pursuing your *liaison* with his wife——"

"What?"

It took a moment for him to realise what had been said. Then Errington's eyes blazed in his paled face.

"You—you blackguard!"

He made a step forward, he seized hold of him. For a moment Errington could see nothing but poor Sybil's suffering face on the pillow, he was carried away by the rush of memories that her husband's name evoked. Here, at least, there was nothing of which he need be ashamed. "God!" he cried, "to think that you should take her name upon your lips! *You*—you worm; apologise, damn you, apologise. Do you hear what I say?" He shook him till the veins in his forehead swelled.

Berenice was terrified for Fred. How big her lover was, how strong, how brave! She came between the two men, putting a trembling hand on Errington's coat-sleeve.

"Let him go, let him go," she faltered. "He did not mean it. He is only angry because I—I defended you, he does not know."

It had not been Welch-Kennard's way to lose his temper when there was a woman beside him. This one,

with her frightened eyes and her halting words, all tremulous, brought him back to himself.

"I beg your pardon."

He released Fred.

"Forgive me, child, forgive me."

Any attack upon himself would not have moved him; but an attack upon Sybil, that martyr, that poor crucified woman, dying now, and brave, had unnerved him.

"You don't know what she has gone through," he said, huskily. It was to Berenice he was excusing himself, not to Fred.

"I do know, at least, I can guess," she cried. "Fred, Sybil Heseltine is paralysed, she is a terrible invalid; anybody who has told you anything cruel about her, or— or Mr. Kennard, cannot know her. She suffers all the time, and so bravely! She never speaks of it even, but laughs, and pretends she is quite well."

Her heart went out to her lover, who was so true a friend to this poor sufferer. What a man he was, generous and loyal and true! Indeed, she might be proud of his friendship.

"Oh! I am sorry, sorry." She went to him where he stood, with his back to Fred, recovering himself.

"I am sorry he hurt you about poor Sybil," she said.

"Thank you, thank you, child." His voice was still husky, and he had to walk to the window to hide his eyes. Sybil Heseltine had suffered, few but he knew how greatly.

"Get rid of him," he said presently, indicating Fred, "get rid of him. We must have all this out, you and I, just you and I."

She yearned to tell him what she thought of him, to

comfort him, to be alone with him. Whatever had stood between them, nothing could stand now.

"Go, Fred, go," she entreated. Yes; they must be alone!

"I know you did not mean to be cruel. Some one has been telling you lies; if everything you have heard is as true as that about Sybil Heseltine, poor Sybil, it is wicked, wicked of them. She is paralysed."

"It is not only what I have heard about her," he said, sullenly. "I have seen Sir William Helbert, he showed me letters to his wife from this man, disgraceful letters."

She shuddered away from him.

"Horrible and—treacherous. I don't want to hear about it. Go, Fred, go."

"You—you order me out of the house? Out of Norman's house? You refuse to make any inquiries?"

The truth, as it burst from her lips, struck both the men who heard it.

"It would make no difference," she said. "If everything you have told me were true, it would make no difference between us, between him and me."

He had said "sweetheart" to her, he had defended his friend. Her heart was liquid, and ran to him, her eyes, too, were swimming. A silence followed her words. She was suddenly shaken by the words she had spoken, with the realisation of them. Nothing would make any difference, nothing. For her, there was only one man in the world.

For a moment or two after the door had closed on Fred, Errington stood silent. Then he went over to her, where she had sunk down on the sofa, hiding her eyes, her crimson cheeks.

"Would it make no difference?" he asked, softly.

"Would nothing make a difference?" he asked, kneeling by her side. "Nothing? Answer me, don't keep me in suspense. Darling!" He forced her hands from her face, and made her look at him. "Answer, answer me."

"Not—not if you want me."

"Want you? If you only knew? Will you have me for your husband, dear, me, all stained and tired? Is that how you love me? Do you love me, Berenice?"

She wanted only the shelter of his breast, of his encircling arms, she was suddenly shy of what she must tell him. He let her hide her face now, against his shoulder. And, holding her so, again his conscience shook him, clamorous doubt made desperate his appeal.

"Child, child, don't be glad, don't be happy." His voice was shaken, he was shaken. "It is not a good thing for you. *Think!* I am years older than you, and poor, in debt, too, with millstones round my neck. *Think!*"

"Oh! I am glad I may; I am so glad I may——"

"What are you glad of, my sweet?"

"That I may care, as much as I like. I am glad you are poor, and—and have troubles that I may lighten, and—that you want me," she whispered.

He knew that it was unfair. He had no illusions. His life had been full of tawdry emotions, cheap loves; he had trafficked in stolen kisses. He had nothing left for the one woman; but he desired her passionately. If she could condone the past, the future should hold nothing but his devotion to her. That is what he told her, that is what he told himself.

"I have nothing for you but my love."

The words came haltingly from him, that he had

nothing for her but the shelter of his arms, his half-tired arms, his lips that had been staled before he met her.

"But you are giving me everything, everything. I had nothing before I met you. I want only to be allowed to care for you. Oh! I was glad in all Fred said; it brought you nearer to me, made it more possible. I had been frightened before, often, always. It was too good to be true that such a man as you could care for me. I am so ignorant, so . . . so unworthy. I know what you have been to Sybil, to other people. I know, without any one telling me, what you are."

She freed herself painfully from her garment of shyness. She would give herself to him utterly. Since he was humble and said he was unworthy of her, she would let him see she knew she was not fit mate for him, that she recognised his greatness.

"If it is only me you want," she said, "I am proud. If what Fred said be true, that you are poor, I am so glad I can help. Dear, I am so glad. If it be true—about—about these poor women, we will do something for them. Oh! how unhappy they must be, because you don't care for them."

He meant to tell her everything, but such confidences have their ellipses.

She learnt he was in debt, she had to guess to what he owed his embarrassments. How could he tell her how he had wasted his substance? She read into the broken confession, punctuated with love speeches, which he insisted upon making before he would let her promise herself to him, that women had come to him, or been sent to him, because they were in trouble; that their troubles had moved his tenderness, that his tenderness

had aroused their passions, and he had crowned their poor giving, the gift of themselves which they had forced upon him, with baubles and luxuries, and pleasures; that, to get out of the debt, which was no debt, he had lavished dress and jewellery and travel, and the great dower of his friendship.

She was so proud that he came to her differently. Disentangling the bundle of woe he gave her, all confused, by the magic light of her love for him, she saw that this woman had come to him to find relief from a drunken husband, and that from an austere one. It was Sam Beethoven's half-maniac temper, his violence, that made his wife seek for help; it was the narrow insincerity of her husband's church that had driven unhappy Lady Helbert from a house of little altars and graven images, where she was always the sacrifice, and he was always the saint, and the intervention of the priest between herself and her babies had made implacable the passion of her resentment.

And Norma, too—he could not even stand self-condemned where Norma was concerned, a “bay where all men might ride.”

He thought he was telling her everything; but it was not in him for long to play the humble lover, to reject the sweet balm she offered. He had told her his arms were tired, but presently he showed her they were strong. He had said his lips were staled, but presently he showed her they were exacting.

Then, when he asked her if she was still not frightened, if she still did not think she had better give him up, and marry Fred, whether she was not too young, too much of a child, to reform a prodigal, she had answered out of her ignorance, and the clamour of her

beating heart, that she did not want him reformed, she did not want him different.

That was the crux of it, and to him the crown. Knowing no better, she did not want him other than he was, weak where his heart was touched, impulsive always, with a man's appetites. She said she understood that at that office in Southampton Street other women in trouble would come to him, other temptations. She promised she would always trust him, she would never be jealous of him. It would be her pride to be his wife, to wear his name, to have, and deserve his confidence.

"Dear, I know how many people have come to you, will always come to you, because you are the Sphinx's lawyer."

"Ah! the Sphinx——?"

He questioned her frank eyes. No! Fred's words had not touched her loyalty to her strange friend, the friend who had given them to each other. She read the question, and answered it smiling, blushing a little, very happy.

"Will you tell her?"

"At once, to-night. This is the anniversary of the day Algernon Heseltine came out of prison, broken, insane, dying. The Chinese could have made him undergo no worse torture than they practised on him in our English prison. The lamp of his genius was still burning when he went in. They starved and beat him, because he was a leper. For that, they took away from him the light of day, his books, his pens, they stole from him his power to think. They set him to break stones! Algernon, whose body may have been leprous, but whose soul was alive. When I remember it, there is nothing I would not do for her, or for any of them. You will

always have that to forgive me. Fred would not tell you before me, but I tell you. Because he was a leper, every one who touched him was suspect; and I amongst them. But we wanted to heal him, you must believe that was all. It was the way he was tortured, in the end, the way he stood at bay, knowing that there was something immortal in him, that moved us so."

Already he had forgotten his new-found happiness, the new life that was before him. The experiences of his past life, as they affected Algernon Heseltine, had gone so deep, that nothing could ever near his depths without bruising, too, the tenderness which the sight of the other's agony had caused.

Now, as he walked up and down that atrocious drawing-room, all his moved heart and spirit were full of the things that had made him what he was. She understood nothing, but watched him, and wished, hoped, longed, to be one with him in this. As his memories overflowed his speech, she questioned him timidly.

"He was your friend, I know, and there must have been something great in him. Sybil lent me a volume of his essays once. I don't know what was his crime. But I know he was put in prison, and every stone he broke by day became his heart at night. And she wanted to be beside him when he was tired, but the paralysis overtook her, and he never knew, and nobody ever knew, that she would have stood by him. And she loved him."

His speech had been flooded by his remembrance; but, back in the past as he was, he stopped her then.

"No, no! She did not love him, she never loved him. First his genius amazed, then it won, her. It was only the passion of her pity, and the passion of her

helplessness, that made her what she became. We were all moved by it alike; and in revolt of law. I see the folly of it now, but you cannot imagine. . . .”

Then his eyes met hers, and he knew she could not imagine. He grew reckless over the difference and distance that lay between them, and took her to his arms, and kissed away explanation and argument, becoming the merely exuberant and emotional lover. She was all he had ever dreamed of, or wanted. The past was dead and must be thrust behind. Before him was happiness and the normal, and so it should be.

If he gave himself his head too freely, if she grew a little fearful as the afternoon darkened into evening, it was an exquisite fear with which she thrilled. He led her to the highest note in the gamut of expectation. He forced her to promise him she would not withhold herself from him longer than a few days. He made her shyness melt in his arms, he promised her the crown of womanhood.

Before he left her, she knew nothing except that she belonged to him, and that the few days he had given her were too many.

But, when he tore himself away from her, a great wave of depression met him, even as her street-door was opened. He had played the free man. Yet this was the anniversary of the night Algernon had come out of prison, and he was due at Hans Crescent. They made it a Walpurgis night, this anniversary; if, at the heart of it was pity, it was, nevertheless, riot, and his days of riot were over.

Berenice and the Sphinx! How could he ever reconcile their claims?

CHAPTER VI

BOWLING along in a swift hansom, first to his rooms, then to dinner, lastly to Hans Crescent, it was, nevertheless, not Berenice who filled that strange mind of his, that soft heart; it was Algernon. His mind was full of that maniacal genius, who had not fled from a burning city, but had pulled it down upon himself, and stayed gazing, with the wonder of a startled, unbelieving child, when it crushed about his ears.

Who *could* respect man's justice, judgment, mercy, when one marked what followed? How his friends ran from him, and his enemies hooted, and the herd flung mud and jeered at that colossal fallen figure. The few who stayed beside him were marked men, and mercy was as blind as justice.

Errington remembered, as the panorama of the streets sank and shifted before the windows of the cab, and the haunting figures in the market-place of Piccadilly, lured with satyr faces, and offered unashamed and unrebuked their poisoned wares, that the hypocrite wave of virtue under which Algernon had been submerged missed everything but him. There was no crime but his crime; and his name was *anathema maranatha*.

Yet the man had been mad. "Great wit to madness often is allied." He might have been placed in safety, kept from spreading his disease, from working evil. But Justice was blind and Pity was dead, and common sense was in abeyance. Yesterday they hailed him a genius,

to-day they declared him vile beyond human sympathy. The dastardly unintelligence of the penal code thrilled Kennard to-night as it had thrilled him then.

The fire of his own genius had burnt Algernon's youth. The light that blazed about him obscured for him the minor rules of meaner men. He saw more largely, amazing visions thronged, all sense of proportion became lost. He was not as others. He felt that, and at first the dazzled world which his personality fascinated saw it too, and applauded. When the applause changed to low suspicious muttering, he became more flamboyant; he was supremely conscious of his gifts.

The end was not swift, yet it was upon him before he knew. He stood before his accusers in the dock as a child might have stood, impudent, bewildered, irresponsible. Those for whom he and his ailments held no meaning found him guilty, and sentenced him to a terrible end. He was as a sick child, morally, mentally, physically, dazed, and failing. To cure him, the law, man's cruelty to man, decreed that he should be alone with his changing bewildered self for hour after crushing hour. To strengthen him in his weakness they gave him burnt skilly, and, when the health had all gone out of him, two planks and a wooden pillow were flung to him, so that he might not rest. In time his marvellous mind raised him a little from his hopelessness, and he asked for books. He had loved literature, and contributed to it. They gave him tracts, which the prison parson had written, so that his brain, no less than his body, should starve.

Whatever his crimes, that he had loved the air, the sun, God's sky, the flowers and grass, was, at least, not

crime. Penned in four whitewashed walls, high up, an inaccessible slit showed other prison walls beyond. This was what they did for his spiritualising. For his fine hands, which had penned epic and philosophy, poem, and drama, there were bundles of tarred oakum. When he failed over his task there was darkness, more appalling solitude, less food, stripes. It ought to be incredible, but the whole bare truth is beyond it. The personal degradation to which this man of genius was subjected, the outrages to his glimmering sense and dying manhood, made a martyr of him to those who knew.

When his punishment, or society's revenge, had come to an end, he was let out. Errington waited for him in the Governor's room, and the Sphinx, with a rare few of those who had been faithful to him, waited for him, the table spread for breakfast, at that public-house near the prison gate.

It was a man who had gone to gaol; it was scarcely a man they let out from it.

It was impossible to tell, the years had never dimmed the remembrance, how he had appeared to them after his torture was ended, the rack unscrewed, his marred body released. At first he had clutched with both hands at the remnant of his lost manhood which their presence evoked. He had held his head erect, and welcomed them as if he were once more their host; how gracious were his words to each, how brave was his bearing! Then came his sudden ravening at the food before him; and soon, they saw the haunted, hunted look steal into his grey eyes, the start of fear when the door opened, the poor flush of shame which followed it. At last, came the break-down, his head in his hands, and the sound of his sobs in the room.

"I was face to face with myself all day, all night, that hideous, tedious, pitiful me. O God! the things that crawled, and stung—pitiful, pitiful, pitiful." He was as a child again, dulled with long crying, blinded with pain of brutal punishment, his mere mechanical breathing stale with sobbing. "They tortured me," he spread out his misshapen hands, which had been so fine, now all the nails were blunt and bleeding, "they starved me. And in my ears all day and night I heard the cries of other starving, tortured men—and children. I could not think; I heard nothing but human cries, I shall never hear anything else. I've lost my soul's inheritance, I've lived two years among the damned. My eyes burned and smarted and failed from those whitewashed walls, that skyless window. My eyes were on fire, and my ears were filled with the sound of men crying, and I could not think—the awful—awful solitude, that felon, crouching, haunted figure—*me!* O God!"

They tried to comfort him, but he was past comfort, hope, or help. His two years of solitude and semi-starvation had robbed him of the last vestige of his self-respect; now the degradation had defiled his spirit.

Errington could not forget, and none of them could forget. Every year they met and told each other so. Algernon should not lose his soul's inheritance; they would keep his lamp alight. They had vowed it passionately.

And for all of them, after this, there was neither law nor justice in the land. Only an unutterable hypocrisy, and another crucifixion.

Errington Welch-Kennard, with his heart, his brain and his conscience at war with each other, had lived

through this period. Perhaps, had it not been for the Sphinx, he would have emerged from it.

Could he tell her now that he had no longer any part in her life's tragedy? He knew that he could never tell her. He was in love with that innocent, ignorant sweet girl-woman, and youth was like a vernal Spring about him; only this desperate past was as a blighting chill in the air, and it was from the Sphinx it blew.

He arrived late at Hans Crescent. The pitiful, mock festival was in full swing when he arrived. They sat at the round table in the dining-room, all the men who had met Algernon when he came out of gaol, and many who had never known him. His bust was in the centre of the table, with a fresh laurel wreath crowning it. His books, his poems and plays, vellum-bound, were placed as a votive offering before it; and these, too, had their sprig of laurel. But it was not a funeral feast they were holding, it was an orgy, a Bacchanalian revel. The scheme had always been to assume that Algernon was still with them, the Sphinx being his mouthpiece.

The inverted morality, the *bouleversement* of accepted thought, the ridicule of pharisaism, which had been in Algernon's armoury, were in hers too. It was not "evil be thou my good" that they preached, but the dangerous thesis that there was neither evil nor good, but only Philistinism or Freedom, from which to choose.

The wine had gone round at least as freely as the wit. Many of Algernon's friends, some remotely, some intimately, acquainted with him, were here, and all of them were wreckage. But it was wreckage that glittered brilliantly against the murk and cloud of that stormy past. There was fine blasphemous talk with reminis-

cence, and an effect of blue lightning played fantastically about the ruins.

Kennard, with his heart so full of pity, grew sick as he listened. When Frank Dickinson read his poem *De Imitatione*, and incorporated into the immemorial echo of its subtlety the latest intrigue of the most recent Benedict and his Hero, the cleverness of the parody seemed less than its vulgarity, and Kennard could not join in the laughter or applause. When old Lord Belville held the floor with the *Epic of the Knightsbridge Barracks*, the lilt and swing of the verse were unable to cloak for him the ugliness of its suggestiveness. Brooking's stanzas from his opera were mere meaningless indecency.

But, worst of all, it seemed to Errington Welch-Kennard in his new altered mood, were the presence and the initiation of the new recruits. The ceremonies were over before he arrived, and the young men,—there were four or five of them in the places of honour about the Sphinx,—were all more or less intoxicated, with strange lights in their eyes, shocked faces trying to look callous, weak ones flushed and hiding a gross bewilderment.

One of these lads was a son of General Algernon du Gore. Kennard had met him several times lately at Hans Crescent, and never without a certain regret, distaste, remorse. For the boy, he was little more than a boy, was really one of the Sphinx's victims. Six months ago he was a fresh-coloured, apparently ingenuous, lad. Now he was haggard, with puffed lids and tremulous hands; it seemed as if corruption had fastened on him. When he was called upon he hiccoughed that he was no poet. But, swayed by the ironic cheers and plaudits of the others, he began to pour out a half-incoherent attack on law and order and authority. It appeared

that there was only one god, and its name was Anarchy. Incidentally, one gathered the boy had had some trouble with the regimental authorities, had sent in his papers, and meant to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Sphinx. His speech was not touched with the talent that had illumined the others; it was mere rhodomontade and bathos. Yet no one received more applause, more encouragement, from their hostess. This, too, Kennard resented. He knew why she took especial pleasure in this lad's depravity and its exhibition.

Sir Algernon du Gore had been her husband's godfather, but he had not stood up for him, nor supported him, in his need. Sir Algernon was in Egypt, but his son, Kenneth, was here; and Sybil had sought him out and turned all his weaknesses to vice, with unhappy, almost immediate, success. To-night she had made him leader of the novices.

In due time Errington's aloofness, the want of spirit in his responses, the want of sympathy in his attitude, drew the attention of the Sphinx. He was called upon to speak and at first refused, keeping his seat, and merely shaking his head negatively. He ended by rising reluctantly and standing for a moment or two, glass in hand, unusually unready and hesitating. Sybil suggested a subject to him.

"We have heard something of Benedict, Errington. Give us Benedict, the married man"; she smiled at him, a little cruelly. But Sybil grew cruel only when in pain, and there was understanding, not resentment, in the glance he gave her in reply.

"A new experience has come into my own life to-day," he began slowly, "and its primary effect is to make me doubt——"

They would not let him go on; the word doubt was one they could not hear. Sybil had given them some hint of what they might expect from Kennard. He had always been amongst them, but scarcely of them. They were prompt to meet him with jeers. They would drink to him, through the fumes of wine and smoke, in the atmosphere of ribald jest and laughter, they would toast him, predict his future, but they would not listen to him. He had the gift of eloquence, but to-night it deserted him, he knew he might have made them hear him, but he hardly knew what to say to them. He stood up silently while listening to the badinage, not stemming it, because, not caught by it, he remained still outside. He was satisfied to sit down presently, having said nothing.

He got away as soon as he was able, hating all the past, full of misgivings of all the future.

The next few days he spent in trying to reconcile himself and settle down in his new *rôle*. He was affianced to the only woman he had ever wished to make his wife. He knew he ought to wipe out the record of his life, and make new history with her. That Algernon and Sybil Heseltine were indelibly there must not prevent him covering it with new writing, clear and clean. He assured himself so often that Berenice was the "one great passion of his life," that he made others believe it, almost at the same time as he began to doubt it. In any case, he would be her husband, and the honeymoon was before him.

It was marvellous how his debts and difficulties had melted away when it became known that he was going to marry Norman Darcy's widow. Edward Carker, his family and relatives, no less than his creditors and

impatient duns, seemed suddenly to have found they had been harsh, unfair, and were now anxious to kill the fatted calf, to welcome and congratulate him on his return to the fold. He was curiously happy and impatient, and bored by the way everything was made easy for him. The difference between the new life he was entering, and the old one he was leaving behind, was responsible for his distraction. Could he forsake, neglect, keep his wife from, the Sphinx, from the Hans Crescent coterie? Could he take her, did he wish to take her, into the midst of it?

Every day he became more fully, more definitely, conscious of Berenice's simple goodness. He was undoubtedly in love with her, and all she represented. That he missed the difficulties to which he had always been accustomed, the charm of intrigue, was too obvious to admit.

He had become used, too, to Sybil's companionship, sympathy, understanding. After the supper-party he tried to do without it, but he missed it no less than she would have missed her drug. He was often full of doubt. He was not more content with himself and his circumstances because the Sphinx's door was closed against him, because he had only himself to argue with as to his doubts.

Prince's Gate was already in the hands of the decorators, and the wedding-day was fixed. Every day he became more aware of the beauties of his *fiancée's* nature and disposition. And every day he felt, nevertheless, that the Sphinx had her own inalienable claim upon him; the years and her grief had riveted it. He knew instinctively that there might come a day when the two claims might conflict, hers and Berenice's. That was where he doubted himself.

In his indecision, his sweet strange intercourse with Berenice, his interviews with decorators and furnishing firms, his discussions and settlements with creditors and claims, his constant preparation, the days and weeks slid so quickly by, that he was on the eve of his wedding-day before he had realised his responsibilities, or decided how to reconcile them. He would be rich, free, respectable, received, a Philistine of the Philistines. Aunts and cousins, whom he had not seen for years, were lavishing presents and congratulations. He was no longer the black sheep of that ultra-correct flock, his fleece had regained its whiteness. And he knew the possibilities of surfeit on that fat pasture where white sheep browse.

Berenice missed nothing of warmth when he drove her home, kissed her good-night, whispered in her ear how few more nights of separation there would be. But his own soul was a little sick within him. Was he fit for this domestic idyll preparing for him? Was he already missing something?

That the past never dies, that the mortgage placed by conduct, even by circumstance, upon character, is one that can never be entirely paid off, was the truism that his brain could not reject.

The Sphinx's wedding present, Algernon's manuscript, an unpublished, never to be published, blasphemy, did not help him to forgetfulness.

CHAPTER VII

ERRINGTON swept out his corners as well as he was able. There was nothing so desperate in his financial affairs that prevented their easy adjustment under his new circumstances. It was no longer important to keep certain bills or matters from his partner's ears, and, when the necessity for secrecy had gone, the arrangement with his creditors was merely child's play. Other matters, too, became easier with his easier circumstances. Norma was persuaded by her *impresario* to a tour in America. Elsa Beethoven returned to her husband with an even greater independence than she had enjoyed before. Sir William Helbert found himself without the witnesses on whom he had relied for his deed of separation, and, in the strictest equity, renounced his suit.

There seemed little cloud on the future of Errington and his wife when they started on their honeymoon trip to Italy.

Sybil had been satirical, difficult to understand, when Berenice had bidden her good-bye.

"No! No! I won't come to your wedding. It is very touching of you and Errington to wish it, and I am sure the public would be much impressed at the spectacle of my bath-chair. But I must disappoint them. I'm having a breakfast party here, I think it will be more congenial to me. Tell Errington we shall be thinking of him, talking of him. He will like to hear that. And send him to me directly you get back

from your honeymoon. You mustn't keep him from me. Promise me that you'll never try to keep her lawyer from the Sphinx."

"Never! Never! I promise. I will never keep Errington from you," Berenice said, "your claim on him must ever come before mine." She would have stooped to kiss Sybil; it was so sad to see the traces of her suffering, so desperately sad to think of all she had gone through, of the hopelessness of past and present. But her sweet sympathy exasperated Sybil into more cynical speech.

"I hate to be mauled about. Do keep off, there's a dear child. So, you will control all Kennard's days and hours, and dole him out to me occasionally? It is too amiable of you. Poor Errington, in his gilded cage! Don't forget the sugar between the bars. What will you do when he finds the door inadvertently open, and essays a little flight? Will you shut the door against him, or let him in, and bar it closer another time? I wonder! There! go now, go and be happy in your beautiful honeymoon. He is so experienced, it is bound to be a beautiful honeymoon. Will he invent or remember? Either way, you will be in luck, he is really great, you know. No! you don't know, you child. And you wouldn't understand if you did know. Go away, your innocent absurd eyes are making me feel ill. And the tears in them are insulting. Go."

Berenice resented nothing. Her own exquisite happiness was in such appalling contrast to the other's terrible life-ending. She told Errington afterwards:

"I could well understand her feeling so bitter, so desperate. Poor Sybil! she has had such awful things to bear, such unbearable things. I do not see every-

thing yet quite in your way, and hers—that there ought not to be any imprisonment, that punishment is savagery. But, to have a husband. . . .” At that she blushed and looked at him with tender shyness, for he would so soon be that to her, with all reservations between them at an end. “And to know him suffering, cruelly treated, not to be able to write him tenderly, be near him, comfort him! No wonder she has grown hard. I can’t quite understand what would happen if there were no punishments, no imprisonments. But that is because, of course, I am not as clever as either of you. But that it ought to elevate instead of degrade, that punishment ought to make, and not irretrievably ruin, a citizen, I know, because I have heard Norman say it so often. Although he had no time to make a specialty of it, he hated the criminal law.”

But, with those red lips and bright eyes so near him, Errington could not discuss the Heseltines. He changed the conversation. He was grateful to Sybil for what she had left unsaid. She had not sent for him since the commemoration night. Her wedding present was characteristic, but she had meant nothing unkind by it.

Finally, he started on his wedding journey in veritable honeymoon spirit, for that was the nature of the man. He flung off all that oppressed and depressed him, for Berenice grew daily fairer in her happiness, and he set himself to make the time memorable for his young wife, as, indeed, it was unique for him.

Perhaps one need not pity Berenice Darcy for any disillusionment, any disappointment, that came to her. She had, what few men or women are fortunate enough to know, a perfect, absolutely happy, six weeks. The qualities that make a man a successful lover are, per-

haps, not those that pertain to the domesticated husband; but they are good honeymoon qualities, nevertheless. Errington had tact, experience, and the self-restraint without which neither would have been valuable to him. He easily found the limits of his young wife's capacities, and it interested him, at first, to endeavour to enlarge their borders. He had to open, first, her eyes, and then, her mind, to teach her to see, then to understand, to feel; then he explained the formulæ of feeling. When he had aroused her depths he gave her the poets, teaching her to read, as he had taught her to see and feel. Soon the whole world filled with beauty for her, which glowed and illumined the universe. Everywhere it seemed there were words to fit it, in Italian, in Spanish, in French, and in English. Errington knew all these languages, could translate to her from Boccaccio, no less than from de Musset. Everything was made beautiful, and appropriate and fitting.

All the while that her mind was bursting from its shell of ignorance, and her eyes were dilating with the wonders that she saw, her womanhood was expanding also, meeting his needs, receiving, so it seemed to her, always more than she gave, not only ecstasy, and the fullness of love, but tenderness and exquisite comprehension. Of course, she credited him with even more than he gave. When he saw and spared her blushes, when he prevised and helped her in her inevitable reticences, the half-frightened abandonment of her shyness, she adored his delicacy. For she never realised that he was forty, she four-and-twenty.

Such a honeymoon as Berenice Darcy enjoyed with Errington Welch-Kennard falls to the lot of few women. Because she was rare, she never forgot that it was he

who had turned her face to paradise, that it was with his arms about her she had approached the portals, seen the glory, and entered in.

These are delicate matters of which to write, these honeymoon intimacies. Numbers of brides they estrange definitely and for all time from their husbands; some they render all animal, jealous, absorbing, deaf and dumb to all but self. The proportion of women such as Berenice is so small as to be calculated only in decimals. Hers was the ideal attitude of the woman to the man, and, in his way, Errington Welch-Kennard both understood and appreciated it.

However, an Errington Welch-Kennard cannot, of course, live in a perpetual honeymoon. His wife's monotonous goodness, her steady adoration, her exquisite womanliness, were as definite and certain as the ring-fence to an ordered estate. Almost before the end of the first three months of their married life, she had become a mere charming background to the life that claimed him.

A multiplicity of duties awaited him on his return to London, exhilarating, pleasant duties. The house had been refurnished; it had also to be re-organised. The Darcys had had nothing out of their money, the Welch-Kennards were going to have everything. Their carriages and horses must be of the best, the latest automobile was a necessity. The inefficient, muddle-headed devoted servants who had served Norman Darcy had to be replaced by smart, up-to-date domestics. The butler and matched footmen, Errington's valet, Berenice's French maid, were all models of deportment.

To handle his wife's large estate, to clear his own small one, to place their establishment on the right foot-

ing, were easy matters for Errington. The Prince's Gate house rapidly assumed a distinctive air. Banished were the Landseers, the marble busts, and the nineteenth-century furniture. There were Elzevirs on the library shelves, and the drawing-room, freed from terrible ormolu and red damask had become a treasure-house of Chippendale furniture of the Chinese period, lacquer screens, and oriental ceramics. All this occupied another three or four months.

It was not until Errington found himself yawning at five o'clock tea, after a morning at Christie's, and an afternoon in the park, that he voiced to himself again that wealth, respectability, and the approval of one's family, are none of them stimulating. He had feared this in the last days before his marriage, the shadow of boredom had haunted some few of his later amorous moments. He had dimly surmised the possibilities of *ennui* that lie in the society of a really good and beautiful wife. He realised the possibility on that sunny afternoon, early in May, when the sun streamed across the park into the fascinating library full of its rare volumes.

He yawned, he wondered what the devil he should do with himself. He never had been a club man, and all his old haunts were closed to him. He had called at Hans Crescent early in the afternoon, but Sybil's door was barred to visitors. Each attack now lasted longer, left her weaker. He could not think of the Sphinx easily, it hurt him to think of her, and of how little use, he, or his great prosperity, could be to her.

Yet it was this perpetual remembrance that made him so sympathetic, so quickly responsive, to Berenice when she came to him excitedly that afternoon, with

wet eyes, and with a story, almost incoherent at first, through the passionate pity of its relation, sad enough when he got at it at length and sifted its details.

Emily Darcy was president of some charity society that was familiarly known, so to speak, by its Christian name—alluded to as the S.P.M., for instance. She had written, asking for the Welch-Kennard patronage. For it was against the Darcy tradition to quarrel with relatives, and, already, all the Darcys, even Fred, had called on the newly married couple. Berenice was longing to make some return for all the happiness that had come to her; and she had gone to the meeting, to which she had been invited, intending to help with money, or personal service, or in any way that was required of her. She had not understood the methods of feminine charity.

The pensioners of the Society, or those that desired to become pensioners, had to appear before a committee of commonplace inquisitive women, and state their cases personally. Some of these poor folk made their appeals badly and hesitatingly, some of them with hypocrite tears and desultoriness, one of them. . . .

It was this one, her story coming at the end of a long and trying afternoon, who had broken up the calm Berenice had spent all her strength in maintaining. After a short scene, in which the committee discovered Mrs. Kennard's singular unfitness to be one of their judicial body, she had come back to her husband, incoherent with indignation, and with something deeper and more lasting than indignation.

"The poor women! they came, Errie, and told their stories. Such stories! Asking for so little, a few shillings to tide them over a child's illness, a husband's

accident. And they hated having to ask for help. Then we cross-examined them. Oh! Errie, to be hungry, and wanting bread for your children, and to be asked suspiciously for your marriage certificate, or a letter from the rector, or your last employer, and how much you earned, or your husband earned, and to be lectured as to how you should spend eighteen shillings a week and save for a rainy day! And, Errie, at last a poor old woman came, who looked so bent and shabby and old, the grief in her grey old face forced tears into my eyes before she spoke, she could hardly speak. They asked her questions, they wouldn't help her, Errie. . . ."

When Berenice got as far as that she burst out crying.

"Never mind. Don't cry, dear. You shall help, we will help her. Tell me about it."

Errington was very gentle in his questioning. His wife was really dear to him. She had not wept since her marriage, he could not bear to see her cry. All his boredom left him. He drew her into his arms. She talked, when her sobs had ceased a little, and she could talk, with her face hidden on his shoulder, feeling how blessed she was in such a husband.

"She wanted help for her son, not for herself, she said. She had never asked for help for herself. There was pride in that quavering old voice. When they questioned her I felt as if they were questioning me, I got so hot and wretched. I saw there was something she would not say. I watched, I wanted to tell her not to say it. I did say: 'Never mind, if you don't want to tell us, we will help you all the same, we see you need it; don't go on'; but they made her tell them. 'He is just out of prison,' she said, 'my dear boy is just out

of prison,' and the tears rolled down her cheek—the tears of a broken old woman. 'Oh! we don't help felons. Try the Prisoners' Aid Society. That is what Emily Darcy said, not a word more. The old woman turned to go away, quite humbly; she made no protest, a sigh or sob was in her throat, and her eyes were so piteous. I got up from my seat. I think I said something rude to Emily, I can't remember, I had begun to cry too. I ran after her. I could only say, 'What is it, dear, what is it? Try to tell me.'"

She waited a few minutes with her head hidden against his shoulder. Errington could see the scene vividly—the whitewashed committee room, the stiff-necked judicial feminine committee, and his Berenice among them! He could picture her rush from the room to arrest that abject old woman, whose tears were streaming down her face, and who had no words or protest. He saw Berenice's arms about her, and heard her gentle "What is it, dear?"

"Go on," he said, and kissed the bright hair. "Go on, tell me about it."

"Her boy was dying now, that was what she wanted to tell them; she needed help, for the first time, so that she could give him nourishment, warmth, even luxury, she knew we owed it to him, we who acquiesced in the laws. All her life she had worked. She was only forty-eight, although she looked seventy. Her husband had died two years after her marriage; he was killed at the docks. She had this little boy, and toiled at making list slippers, and she had never asked anybody's help. She said to me, 'He were that pretty, ma'am, and that gentle, as never was.'"

The mother's words came back to Berenice's mind, and through her lips, quite simply.

"And he had blue eyes and golden hair, Errie, and called her Mammy. He was in the 7th Standard before he was twelve; a good boy, everybody said he was a good boy. When he left school he was an errand boy, and then a carman. Nobody had a word against him. He got a situation at the Army and Navy Stores . . . I'll never go there again, never. He was searched one day—it seems all the employes bind themselves to submit to this. They found three cigars upon him! He said the buyer *gave* them to him. But he couldn't prove it, and he wasn't properly defended; it was all done so quickly. They sentenced him to three months' imprisonment, with hard labour. He was all she had, and they lived together always, and he never left off calling her Mammy. She said she took the same care of him as if he'd been a gentleman's son. He was always delicate, and his grandfather died of consumption . . ."

Errington drew her closer into the shelter of his arm, and let her cry there.

"Well?" he said, "well?"

"He caught cold in the gaol, he had no under-vest when he went in, so they gave him none. And the food was so little and bad, and didn't nourish him, Errie. He—he broke a blood vessel. He was alone all one night in that whitewashed cell, vomiting blood, thirsty, dying. He couldn't get to the bell. Yesterday they let him out. She says she has never slept all the time of his punishment, thinking of him on his plank bed, nor eaten. And now the doctor says he can hardly last the week out—all for those three cigars. Seventeen years old, dying prison-stained, in awful despair, hopeless of mercy, having known none. Oh! can't we do something, anything, for these horrible laws?"

"Capital punishment for stealing three cigars!"

He was very little less moved than she. He had forgotten; but once those were the things that burnt him. Slothful and lazy he had grown, not generous, as of old, in seeing wrong, the Quixote in him sleeping. Now, soothing and comforting his wife, he was seeing a vision beyond the sordid common little tragedy over which she was sobbing. The vision was before him of Algernon, in convict clothes, on a public railway platform, handcuffed, chained to another malefactor, while a drunken man spat at him; in that vision he saw Algernon's anguished eyes.

The Sphinx and he together had heard of that incident. How they had cursed the laws that had made such an outrage possible.

"We'll do what we can. We must do all that is in our power. Hush, child, hush, don't cry, it doesn't help them, it hurts me. Why didn't we hear of it before? I would have defended him, I would have pleaded for him."

"I know."

He kissed her hair.

"You could have saved him." She sobbed.

"Perhaps; at least, I should have tried."

"Errington, we can't sit still whilst these things happen."

The current of his thoughts was altered by the conversation, and he loved his wife for her wet eyes. This amazing marriage of his had not, after all, lost its charm.

He promised he would see the woman to-morrow, and supplement what Berenice had done for her. He talked of the new open-air cure for consumption, he per-

sued her that the mother had despaired too soon, he raised her drooping spirits, and his own with them. Then he declared that he would not have her unhappy. She must go upstairs and dry her eyes, and put on her very smartest frock, and come out and dine with him at the Savoy.

She met his variability through her tears. She realised that his sensitiveness was too exquisite for pressure. It was her great charm for him that she made so little demand, but yielded to him so completely.

"We'll dine at the Savoy and go on to the Gaiety."

"It would be delightful. I do love doing unexpected things."

"But we ought to have a party. Shall I telephone the Galsworthys?"

"It always seems best to me being alone with you." The smile through the tears was rainbow-sweet. Quite a fresh admiration for her was awakened; her tears had touched him strangely. It was in natural reaction that the spirit of mischief entered into him.

"How would it be to sup in a private room afterwards? That would be really a new experience for you, at least, I suppose so."

Perhaps he had hoped to see her colour deepen, but, instead, it was a grateful smile that met him.

"Yes, I should like that immensely, just you and I together, without the noise and bustle of people."

"You would like a new experience?" he said curiously. He was playing with some unlicensed reminiscence. It had always been pity that had aroused his passion, tears that had led to his undoing.

"I like everything we do together. I have been very

little to restaurants in London. Norman was always an invalid, and he liked his own house best."

"The house with the marbled wall-paper, and the Landseers, the jute tablecloth, the ormolu . . . oh!" But this was under his breath. She was really unique. The tear-stains under her eyes made his heart beat. He was in love all over again.

"So you see, until I went abroad with you, until our honeymoon, I had hardly ever had a meal out of my own house, except with our Darcy relatives, till that wonderful supper at the Carlton, when we met."

The love in her wet eyes affected him; he caught her closer to him.

"So you still think that a wonderful supper? You are not a bit disillusioned?"

With her face hidden against his shoulder, she whispered:

"I love you endlessly, immeasurably."

He vowed it was charming of her.

The little dinner at the Savoy that night was a complete success. Errington was conscious of having the best-looking woman in the room at his own table. She had learnt, too, to dress exquisitely; there was a touch of distinction in her shy bearing, and the French maid was an artist in arranging that luxuriant hair. Her slender throat and small ears were delicately perfect; and her eyes and all her thoughts were with him. He played with his imagination—the supper in the private room after the play—he pictured the possibilities, past adventures crowded upon him.

He was very gay at dinner, conscious, too, that if Berenice attracted men's eyes, he could hold those of

their companions. He talked brilliantly, fluently, continuously. It was absurd of him to be bored. Life sparkled about him like sunlight dancing upon water.

Kennard had effloresced a little since his marriage; it was inevitable. He had always loved rare and beautiful things, now the pearls in his shirt-front were black, the buttons of his waistcoat were of the most delicate workmanship, serpentine in diamonds around blue enamel, his sleeve links were pink pearls set *a jour*. Perhaps his figure had grown a trifle, anyway, he was supremely self-conscious.

The musical comedy was dull, but, to his amusement, perhaps a little to his uneasy exhilaration, a new dancer, graceful, slender, sinuous, aroused his interest, his attention.

Berenice benefited, he was sweet to her at that little supper in the private room. He was ready to play for her delectation alone the whole *scenario* of the *comédietta* that might have been.

She was confused, surprised, but submissive, wifely—Berenice, in fact. There was no vice in her. He was ashamed of his experiment, and abandoned it in the making.

CHAPTER VIII

NEVERTHELESS that little serious conversation with his wife, that sad case she had related to him, bore fruit. Many motives moved him. He was, after all, too vain and too able a man to be satisfied with mere ease. He was sufficiently clever to be aware of his weaknesses. Although he was in love with his wife, the appeal of that new dancer at the Gaiety, a sudden interest in a trim little figure crossing a road, a gleam of invitation in the bright eyes of a telegraph clerk, even the swish of a silk petticoat on the stairs, reminded him constantly that the blood in his veins was still warm.

He must work. Work is the only panacea for this type of restlessness. He had never been an athlete, so that way of rescue was not open to him. And he meant to make his wife a good and faithful husband, notwithstanding that, in her rare intervals of ease, the Sphinx would send for him, and jeer at him, and he would fall in with her mood when she would encourage him to talk of the pleasures of variety, and the sheer suburbanism of domestic virtue.

No! work was what he wanted, and must have. Without it, his strength would go out of him, his power, and even his intellect, would grow dull. All the exercise he had had for it, and for his imaginative powers for months, had been telling his wife the things he wanted her to know in the way he wanted her to know them. And he was surfeited with his success. He was not the

man to be known as the husband of that "charming Mrs.——"

In his first revolt from such a suggestion, he began a literal translation of Omar. That nobody wanted to read it when it was finished did not hurt him at all. It had helped him through some domesticities, and it had proved to himself that his mentality was not failing. It had given him excuse for seeking Sybil's stimulating society. Together they had discussed phrase and meaning. But when it was finished, he wearied again for occupation.

Berenice, too, had not been idle in her happiness. Norman Darcy had his fine memorial. She began to interest herself too in many charities, institutes, and organisations. Errington could not afford to sit still.

Sybil chaffed him about his wife's philanthropies; but it seemed there was no nearer interest coming to her, and Errington was too wise in women not to know that a hobby of some sort is essential. Otherwise havoc is wrought by senseless exaction and demand. He shrugged his shoulders about it when he talked to the Sphinx. Women were but children, he said, and must have their toys. And, after all, philanthropy was more dignified than dogs, kennel club quarrels, and natural history detail. Berenice had no turn for bridge, racing, or croquet. Children, apparently, were not in the programme. At this Sybil laughed, and Kennard was rather furious. He went on to say that his wife had no enthusiasm for curios. At which she laughed again.

It was not necessary to tell Sybil that he was proud of his wife's pursuits, that his practical intelligence helped her, and every charity with which she associated herself. There were many sides to Errington Welch-

Kennard's character. Sybil and Berenice each saw him differently. He could not dissociate himself from the Sphinx, nor free himself from the spell that had held him so long; but he kept the two women apart as much as it was possible for him to do so. Sybil's health made it comparatively easy. The general paralysis, from which she was suffering, grew upon her. The intervals between her attacks of pain were not to be wasted on any save those who understood her; both of them felt that. And, as long as he came, it was indifferent to her if Berenice stayed away.

But when, in the exhilarated restlessness that followed that evening at the Savoy with his wife, he wanted to resume the active pursuits of his profession, and found himself beginning to go regularly to the office, to the surprise of Edward Carker, but also to his exceeding satisfaction, it was the Sphinx who suggested to him that he should leave the lower grade of the law, that he should pass his examinations, eat his dinners, and be called to the Bar. She it was who told him that in the forum, where men congregate, where eloquence counts, where there are great prizes, he would win his triumphs.

Of course, the idea appealed to him, held him.

Why not? What other men could do he could do, or more. There was once a brilliant stockbroker who became a celebrated K.C., who was even then being talked of for the Chancellorship.

It hung in the balance for some weeks whether he would essay the Bar, or remain with the firm in Southampton Street. An accident, and Berenice's entreaty, perhaps, too, the natural indolence of prosperity, decided him on the simpler course.

A treasury prosecution, initiated in response to a fictitious, press-made public clamour, resulted, through the great talent of the counsel for the prosecution, in the conviction of a company director, who committed suicide in the dock. It happened that Berenice had met the man's unhappy wife, and she knew that, whatever the dead company director had been in his public life, at home he was a loved father and husband, the centre of his circle. When the newspaper boys were shouting out their news, "Company director commits suicide in the dock. End of 'Thessiger Rong,' case," her heart leapt to the woman waiting, with what calm she could, for the verdict of the jury, for the sentence of the court, on the man in whose arms she had slept for thirty years of honoured wifedom. He had chosen to go before a higher tribunal; but Berenice found her heart aching for his wife.

That night the Welch-Kennards were dining out, and the conversation turned naturally upon this case, and its result. The great advocate, who had prosecuted for the Treasury, was discussed, his eloquence and his pitiless logic were admired.

It was then that their host, turning to Errington, took up, as it were, the parable of the Sphinx.

"That is where you ought to be, Kennard. You ought to have been at the Bar. There is no saying what a man of your talents could have done."

The quick flush came into Berenice's cheek. She answered for him, impulsively, without giving herself time to think:

"But surely, General, surely, to fight in such fields is to win sad victories."

Then she was ashamed of her words; but Errington,

seeing her drift, flung himself into the argument, seized her point, and pressed it home.

"My wife is right, General. An advocate must see only his goal, or his client's goal, and go straight for a result, an effect, obliterating from his sight everything that is outside the perspective, ignoring women's and children's tears, desolate and disgraced families, all the infinite eddies that follow crime, even as a pool into which a stone has been flung. My branch of the profession has the nobler part. We can settle cases out of court. We can save disaster, avert shipwreck, find the golden mean."

The conversation ebbed and flowed, but Errington persuaded himself as he talked, decided for himself as he talked.

In the carriage, going home, Berenice thanked him for his decision. Afterwards, in those hours left sacred to her, those hours when a wife has her chance against any outside influence, and wins always if she uses it aright, she thanked him again for his decision.

Errington would not go to the Bar. He would remain where he was. As a mere solicitor, he was in the position, would often be in the position, to keep cases out of court altogether. He could plead for criminals, *with* them, perhaps, in his office. She was sure he could do more good that way. She was appalled at the prospect of her dear one standing up in court, using his power and his presence, that voice she loved, and his great gift of eloquence, to some poor man's undoing. Even if that poor man should be a wicked one, and well deserving his fate, Errington must not be responsible for his punishment.

So it was ultimately decided. Sybil yielded, when

she found that Kennard's inclinations were all against her. Her influence had not been gained by force.

Errington Welch-Kennard would use his energy, exert his strength, his intelligence, in Southampton Street.

Messrs. Kennard and Carker soon felt the effects of Errington's new activities. Their business expanded rapidly. They had not been accounted criminal lawyers, yet it was in this branch the development took place.

There was another cause that contributed, perhaps, to this result. The great criminal lawyer of the late nineteenth century had fallen into bad health, he had grown rich, a little idle, perhaps. His son was unable to keep the reins of the big business in his comparatively inexperienced hands. When Sir Reuben Mark was too ill to see clients, and young Reuben was honeymooning, the Princess Norma di Pagliavicini brought her celebrated suit against the Prince.

It is possible she would have gone to Kennard, anyway, for advice. He had certainly been invaluable to her in adjusting matters between her and Lord Manningtree in his pre-nuptial days. But she had progressed since then. She was a very smart lady now, since her marriage with the cousin of the reigning house of Italy. Her suit against him was the event of the season.

Kennard, who hesitated when first she came to him, was moved without much difficulty to take up the case; and, once he had taken it up, he threw himself into it with something of his old impetuosity and enthusiasm. Berenice was told all about it. That is to say, she was told just enough to make her think the Princess a very unfortunate and badly treated lady. She begged Errington to do his best for her.

Norma hardly knew what to make of the sympathetic visit Berenice paid her in her luxurious suite at the Savoy. The two women were extraordinarily incongruous, and the scene between them needs the pen of a Thackeray. Norma, in her lace *peignoir*, and disingenuous hair, scented and frilled, and exquisitely artificial, was confronted by Berenice, in the simplest of walking frocks, with impulsive, outstretched hands, and offers of help, countenance, friendship.

"My husband told me how badly you have been treated. I am so glad he will help you to get back your fortune, your jewellery. You must have suffered so! May I help you too? He and I—my husband and I."

It was pathetic to see how proud she was when she said "my husband," the pretty flush that deepened the carmine of her cheeks.

"We are so sorry for you. Won't you come to us whilst the suit is pending?" She was eager in her hospitality. "You must hate the publicity of this."

Norma, to whom publicity was, and always had been, as meat and drink, raised her bold eyes, but dropped them again, for what she read in those she met abashed her.

"It must be so terrible to be deserted. I know it is not because he took your jewellery, your diamonds, that you are unhappy."

The little adventuress had no words.

When Errington came home that evening, and heard of Berenice's visit to his client, he was first dismayed, then convulsed with internal laughter, finally full of curiosity as to the details of the interview.

But, later on, he heard them more realistically from Norma.

"Say! Kennard, you've struck oil in that wife of yours. She's a daisy, that's what she is. I suppose you'll carry on just like you used, but it's a shame. She's too good for you."

"I am flattered."

"Of course you are! But it's her ignorance, that's what it is. Think of her wanting me to come and stay with you until you've got back my diamonds for me——"

"The Pagliavicini diamonds——" he interrupted.

"He gave them to me," she interjected defiantly.

"To his wife!"

"I am his wife."

Errington laughed. They were in his private office. The room, with its eighteenth-century furniture and few fine prints was unlike an ordinary lawyer's office. The dull legal tomes and accumulation of "Burke," "Dodd," and "Landed Gentry," the directories and peerages, acquired dignity behind the reticulated glass and inlay of a Chippendale bookcase. The historical *armoire*, the big curved sofa, were more in keeping with the man than with his profession.

"Of course you are his wife. Or would have been but for your little indiscretion before a registrar with John Travers! But, apparently, they don't know about that yet. And, of course, Pagliavicini gave you the diamonds. Only they happen to be heirlooms! We need not humbug with each other, need we, little woman?"

"John Travers is dead," she said sullenly.

"Perhaps."

"You are not going to throw me over?"

"Not I. But we are walking on broken glass, and if we don't step carefully we shall cut our feet. So

my wife asked you to come and stay with us in Prince's Gate? Tell me what she said."

Norma gave the scene with her inimitable histrionic talent. Proud of Berenice for her action, for the dignity with which she had performed it, it was still not possible for Errington to fail Norma in his tribute of appreciation.

He thanked his wife when he got home that evening for what she had done, and told her how much the Princess Pagliavicini had been touched by it, and that he was happy in her sympathy and help.

The Pagliavicini matter would, perhaps, not have been attended with so much publicity had it not been that there was a singular dearth of news. The *Daily Mail* devoted a column to the Pagliavicini pedigree, and the degeneracy of the particular member of the family, who, having torn this well-known and charming cantatrice from the stage, had flung her aside after six weeks of wedded happiness, taking with him all her jewellery, leaving her practically penniless. It was good journalism, but bad fact.

However, there was quite sufficient influence at work to prevent the scandal reaching very large proportions. What the Princess received in lieu of the diamonds never became public knowledge. Presently, there were admirably worded paragraphs conveying the impression that the young couple had made up their differences; and, when these were followed by the announcement that an enterprising American manager had arranged a tour in the States for the Princess, the whole matter began to assume its right proportion, and the "Princess" her right place.

Kennard's tact in the affair was thoroughly appre-

ciated. The Prince and his legal advisers seemed hardly less satisfied than Norma and her sensation-loving sympathisers. That Sir Reuben Mark in his best days could not have managed it better, was the unanimous verdict of the right people.

Errington, who had the gift which distinguishes the man of ability, of seizing his opportunity, began now to entertain at Prince's Gate, on a rather large scale. There are always people ready to be entertained. The plutocracy were not afraid to go to the Kennards. They were meeting their equals, no one would borrow of them. The equal of the plutocrat is merely the man with a banking account.

Then, Errington was attractive to men of intellect. One began to meet amusing people at Prince's Gate. The social circle grew quite quickly.

Sir Reuben's wife was affected, exclusive, patronising. Berenice was all that is different. She radiated goodness, and her courtesy, her ingenuousness and youth, her candour and completeness, gave her an immediate standing with the best of those who came.

Of course, they had luck. It was almost within the same week as the Pagliavicini matter that the Honourable Peter Kinross got into trouble, through his injudicious advocacy of another outraged lady. And the Countess of Wraybury showed her gratitude to the lawyer who had so admirably managed her son's case before it reached the President of the Divorce Court by offering to present his wife at court.

There were not so many pretty women at court that year that Berenice passed unnoticed. She and her clothes were paragraphed, the Darcy fortune was quadrupled. Every photographer in London began to ask

her for complimentary sittings. At a ball given by the Marchioness of Tewkesbury, the Prince of Wales danced twice with Berenice, and asked that she should sup at his table.

After this, the Welch-Kennard's social success was assured.

The business progressed in the same remarkable manner. Within two years of the Pagliavicini incident, it was said that Messrs. Kennard and Carker had created a "corner in divorce," that the circumventing of a blackmailer was easy child's play to them, and that Sir Reuben Mark had never been "in it" with Errington Welch-Kennard in his employment of the famous word "compromise."

For Kennard, seated in his office, realising with that fine intelligence of his, and comprehending, through his large heart, that human nature is very prone to err; seeing round, and through, each case, with the unbiased eyes of a higher charity, ignored mere man-made justice. He learnt the laws only so far as the knowledge enabled or aided him to evade them. He saw uneducated or ineradicable instinct where a judge would have seen only crime; accident, where another might have seen intention; and, always, the anguish of the women.

Kennard, whatever his faults, had one truth so distinct in his mind, that he could not but show it in his conduct. He knew that never a verdict is given by a jury, never the word "guilty," lightly spoken by the foreman, wakes the echo of the court, but some innocent wife or child, brother or husband, sister or mistress, bends a dishonoured head, with eyes wet with the tears that never yet have been able to wash away the shame which an adverse verdict carries with it. He was, and

it cannot be forgotten, not a lawyer only, but a man, whose boyhood's hero had staggered out of an English prison, degraded out of manhood, broken, insane from solitude, a thousand times worse than before his punishment began.

CHAPTER IX

THE Kennards had been married about three years, and were in the very zenith of their popularity and prosperity, when Berenice received from her half-brother a letter announcing his return to England, asking a welcome from her, reminding her that she was his only relative.

The Kennards were at breakfast when the letter arrived. It was still Berenice's delight to minister to her husband, to pour out his coffee, to butter his toast, to wait upon him.

Harry Annesley's letters to her had been quite regular. Nothing indicated that there was anything of an unusual interest in this one. She laid it aside until breakfast was well on its way.

A dutiful correspondence had been begun between her and her half-brother on her marriage with Norman Darcy. The Darcys had always set great store on the ties of blood, and it was at her first husband's desire that she had begun to write to Harry.

And Annesley had appreciated her letters, with the kinship she claimed, and had answered them promptly.

The man was an abstraction to her. He had left England when she was less than two years old. Gradually, imperceptibly, Berenice had woven in her mind a picture of this distant half-brother. She had grown fond of her creation. The correspondence had become more and more friendly, more and more confidential.

Berenice revealed herself completely in those letters. Unconsciously, they had been a safety valve to that unemotional first marriage of hers. Later on they had become a form of diary.

Harry Annesley must have known of her dawning love for the lawyer called in to arrange her affairs before she knew of it herself; for his sympathetic response had synchronised with her early wedding day. Later, he had sent her a very valuable wedding present, a magnificent rope of matched pearls. With this had come a letter that riveted his claim upon her. He told her that she must not let her new marriage interfere with her correspondence with him, adding that her letters were his greatest link with home; he had no other private correspondent, it was on her account alone that he watched for mail days! He said that he was not a poor man, and that his purse was hers, that, had he not known how well she was situated, he would have sent her money in lieu of gems. But, in any case, she was to remember always that he was her brother, that he had no one else belonging to him, and that whatever he had, was, and would be, hers. He wrote, too, that, if her second marriage were blessed with children, they would be his heirs, if she were not; for he would never marry. He knew what love was, but would never marry.

There was a hint of romance in this, and Berenice had asked for detail. He had written back that the story of his love was not one that he could write her. But her curiosity was piqued; and the lonely figure of her distant half-brother gained in romance.

Errington knew, in a general way, something of the firm in which Harry Annesley was a partner. Messrs.

Fendell and Co., grain importers, were big people. He was not a man to be influenced by this. If Berenice had had a brother, poor, struggling, out at elbows, it would have seemed to Errington equally fit that she should not disregard the relationship.

But, up to now, Harry Annesley had been, to both the Kennards, little more than a name, a something in the distant background of their lives, inconsiderable, love for the lawyer allied in to arrange her affairs become a vital force in their existence.

The letter which lay on the breakfast table that morning announced that Harry was coming home, that he was middle-aged, tired, and homesick. There was a strain of depression in it. It asked for a welcome.

"I don't know how I shall mix with you and your friends. I have been here so long that I seem to have forgotten English ways. But the little sister that I held in my arms when she was the smallest baby I ever saw, will hold out hers to me now, perhaps? I long to see you. You don't know what your letters have been to me. I am tired out with struggling for money. I don't know why I have gone on so long, I don't see what good my money is going to be to me. I am coming home, half an invalid, morose, not a very pleasant addition to any family. Ask your husband to spare you to me for a few days. I will take you anywhere you care to go, the Continent, the English seaside, anywhere. I know, from all you have told me, what a good fellow he must be. I hope we shall become friends. But I make friends with great difficulty. I have lived alone all these five-and-twenty years. There was no one here with whom I cared to be intimate. I think all the

intimacy I have had with any one has been with you, in your dear letters."

Berenice passed the letter over to Errington.

"Poor chap. Write and tell him he must come straight here, and make his home with us while he is looking about him. If he really is ill, we can look after him better than any seaside or continental doctor, and if he has only 'got a liver,' like most of those fellows get in hot climates. . . ."

"But Galatz is *not* a hot climate, Errie."

"What a matter of fact little person you are! The point is, the fellow is down on his luck—heaps of money, and nobody to care about him. You will have to pet him up a little, as you do me." He flung his arm about her shoulders. "Is there room in your heart for two of us?"

She never lost the habit of blushing at his commendation.

"I should like to have him here," she said, soberly. "You don't know how much I have thought of having a brother all my own. . . . not lately, I mean," she interrupted herself hastily, fearing she might hurt his feelings, or make him think he was less than enough for her, "but when Norman was alive, and afterwards, and before you and I were married."

"I am not a bit jealous! We will take this Anglo-Galatzian to both our hearts, and give him a good time. He will find some changes in London, won't he? I suppose you do not remember him at all?"

"Oh, no. I was only a baby when he went away. My father had some words with him, I don't know what about. I think he repented having a stepmother. When

he wanted to go abroad, the firm he was with found him a post. They had a great opinion of him, my father used to say. He rose and rose with them, and became a partner. I really know very little about him."

"There is a dash of sentimentality in his letter, don't you think?"

She smiled a little wistfully at that.

"I think there is. I think that is what I find attractive in all of them. He says he is morose, but there's an undertone that seems to ask for affection and sympathy. He writes as if his life had been a disappointment to him some way or other, as if it has been set in the wrong key. I have sometimes wondered if it was the coming of my mother to his home that made things wrong for him? If it was really that——"

"You would feel bound to make it up to him. That's so, isn't it?"

"Something like that," she laughed.

A rush of business at the office put the coming of Harry Annesley out of Errington's head. And when, a month or two later, Berenice told him that Harry would be at Southampton within a week, he had almost forgotten who Harry was. When, however, he saw her face fall at his forgetfulness, he rapidly recalled their conversation, and the letter.

"Well, of course you must go down and meet him. That's the thing to do. It will put heart into him when he finds you waiting for him. I would go with you, but perhaps he would rather have you to himself for a little, and I am up to my neck in work just now. What do you say? Would you care to go down? Marie would go with you. And I think you had better take one of the men, Thomas, for instance. It is ten to one

he is travelling without a valet, and Thomas could look after him until he has time to get one."

"Can you do without me?" she said. "I should like to go."

His green eyes smiled at her.

"I will try; but it will not be easy."

"I don't mean that," she blushed. "Of course you can do without me, but, I mean, do you mind?"

"Of course, I mind! But I am not going to be selfish."

"You never are."

"Well, anyway, I know where to come for a good character. If I were you, I should persuade Annesley to come straight back with you, leaving plans for the future, and everything else to be settled later on. He is sure to have a certain amount of business to attend to; tell him he can rely upon me if he wants introductions, or anything of that sort. Yes, you go off to Southampton with the fatted calf in a basket."

"But he is not a prodigal, Errie!"

"Never mind, I daresay he likes roast veal! The fourteenth did you say it was? Haven't we got a dinner here on the nineteenth? That will just give him time to get clothes; I expect he has been depending upon local tailors!"

"You think of everything."

"Not quite; I said nothing about his boots. I once met a man who had been twenty-five years in the Colonies, and who came to dinner in a brand new suit from Poole's and a pair of shooting-boots. As he had also forgotten to wash his hands he made quite a sensation."

"I will remind Harry," she said, smiling.

Berenice went down to Southampton to meet her brother, full of happy expectation. She waited at the hotel for him. That, too, was Errington's suggestion.

"Don't go out to the ship," he had said, "not even if there is a tender. It will only be embarrassing, for you won't know each other. Send him a note, and let him come to you at the hotel."

She watched through her glasses the slow steady arrival of the ship, the throng of men and women on the gangway.

Even before she expected him, he was in the room. She heard the door open, his name announced, and swiftly she turned to meet him, his heart beating, her eyes eager. Her strong imagination saw in him only the embodied word "brother." She took no heed of the manner of man he was or might be, for that was Berenice. She held out both hands to him, with her eyes alight, with her lips quivering, with her voice a little tremulous.

"I would not come out to the quay," she began. "If we had not recognised each other! But now—now you are here."

Her agitation communicated itself to him.

"It is good of you," he said, huskily, "to come so far. How can I thank you?" He took her two hands, and flushed when she offered him her cheek, when his lips touched it reverently. His eyes were as wet as hers.

"You make me feel I am welcome, that I have really come home."

"Do I? I am so glad. That's what I wanted, that's what Errington, what my husband, thought I could do by coming."

"I don't know how to thank you," he said again. "How beautiful you are!"

He was still holding her hands, looking at her. The ready flush dyed her cheek again.

"It is wonderful to have a big brother to pay me compliments!"

"But I thought I had a little sister, and I have got a big one!"

"I have always been glad to have some one belonging to me."

"And what do you think I must have felt about it, alone out there?"

"You liked getting my letters? Norman first made me write."

"I should think I did."

"And am I like what you expected?" she said, a little shyly. He had held her hand so long, he was looking at her so intently, and she had hardly looked at him yet.

"You are a thousand times more beautiful. I understand now why my father was so proud of you."

"Was he?"

"Of course he was."

"Did you go away because you were jealous of me?"

"Don't ask me why I went away. I was a young fool. At first I was jealous of your mother, and then I found she was the sweetest and most beautiful thing in the world. My father accused me of being in love with her, and I was proud to think it was true. Then you came, and I was jealous of you, with both of them."

"But you gave me a doll."

"Oh, yes. I tried to hate you, but I had you in my arms sometimes, and I couldn't do it."

"How old was I when you last saw me, when you gave me the doll? Not two, was I?"

"I don't know. You were a carrotty little thing! You pulled my hair when I kissed you good-bye, and you banged the door in my face! I think you didn't like me because I was black. I was always an ugly fellow."

"Oh, I don't think you ugly," she said quickly. "But we're not a bit alike. I'm sorry about that."

They both laughed when she said he was not ugly, and, certainly, as her eyes dwelt upon him there was no look of distaste in them, rather a tenderness, a baulked maternity, a yearning over him. Harry had never encountered just that look in a woman's eyes before. For the moment, the two had an emotionalism in common. Their voices were unsteady, the next few sentences had no meaning in them, their calm was broken.

He had not expected the sweet letter that had been handed to him, nor her meeting him. He was moved out of all habit. Before they had regained their self-possession some five or ten minutes had elapsed.

To Harry, in this first half-hour, Berenice seemed almost a young goddess. That she should claim kinship with him, nay, that she should insist upon it, was exquisitely beautiful and touching to him.

Her slender grace and beauty had lost nothing since her marriage. She had gained in distinction and style, and had lost nothing of her youth. The whilom carrotty hair had become a deep auburn, her eyes were brilliant under their softness, the sweet tremulousness of her lips was for him. The place she took in his heart in that dingy hotel sitting-room she never lost. His love for her was, perhaps, a little tinged with awe, she seemed

amazingly above and beyond him. That she loved him because he was her brother, and would depend on him, and had written him confidential letters, were all separate delights.

Harry Annesley was about forty-five, awkwardly figured, carrying himself badly, big and uncouth. His clothes, as Errington had predicted, were unfashionably made, and bad at that. He was not far wrong when he called himself "an ugly fellow." It was a rough-hewn face, not of an intellectual type. But his dark eyes were wistful, and he had good teeth. His hands were well shaped. There was something about him that Berenice liked.

"I really don't think you are ugly," she said abruptly, *à propos* of nothing. And then they both laughed again.

"Don't you, dear? I am glad you don't." He took her hand again. "You must try and like me all you can. I have not been liked out there. I was not liked much when I was here."

"I know we shall be great friends," she said.

Their first few hours together endeared them to each other. In some subtle, instinctive way she realised his self-distrust and shyness. Also that he had an aggressive manner, put on to hide those qualities. He spoke abruptly, roughly, to waiter, porter, guard. He was very unlike either man with whom she had been accustomed to travel.

He would not let Thomas do anything for him. He seemed to resent her having a maid with her. In the smallest matters he was utterly tactless. She found herself studying him. She found herself, also, perhaps for the first time since her marriage, a little secretly uneasy about Errington and his sympathy.

Of course, the thing could be put in a nutshell, in a sentence, a sentence which could not shape itself in Berenice's mind, but the shadow of which was behind her thoughts.

Her brother Harry was not a gentleman, had not been used to live amongst gentlefolk. It was wonderful how quickly she knew this, and how sorry it made her feel for him.

Half-way towards London she laid an impulsive hand upon his, and said:

"You are not going to be unhappy, Harry, with us? You are not going to let yourself be unhappy, are you?"

"What made you think I should be unhappy?"

"When we were not talking, when I was watching your face, you looked it. Have you had a great trouble in your life, something you cannot tell me yet?"

"No, yes, well. . . . I can't answer you. Life is very complicated. There, don't ask me any questions, there's a dear. Take me as I am."

A few hours later, when they were at home, when Harry had been shown his room, and a man had been told off to look after him, Errington, going into Berenice's dressing-room to learn what she thought of her new brother, found it very difficult to get her to speak out. Yet, by her apologetic manner, by a certain timorousness new to him in her, he guessed that their newly arrived relative was not going to be an unalloyed pleasure.

The two men's greeting was characteristic. Errington held out a hearty hand, made a graceful speech, was altogether the host and man of the world. Harry's shyness made his voice surly, his unaccustomedness to

the luxury and mode of life around him made him even more awkward than was his wont. There seemed an immediate strain and difficulty of conversation.

The dinner with the three of them was, perhaps, the least congenial and friendly that Prince's Gate had ever seen. In vain Errington plied his guest with wine; he grew depressed rather than convivial. He tried him with politics. This was the time when Errington had bought Cliphham Rise, and had commenced to woo the Kent constituency in the Conservative interest. Harry, it appeared, was a Radical, with anarchical sympathies! Errington mentioned sport. Harry thought cricket, polo, football, all waste of time. He did not know the name of one horse from that of another, when the topic of racing was introduced. He had no idea the Derby was run in May. Errington tried business, Harry thought he was being pumped, apparently, and made the shortest of replies. He said he did not know anything about "wheat corners."

Berenice watched them both with increasing dismay. She tried her best to bring them together, putting in a sweet word here and there. She was sure Harry did not mean that he thought all forms of exercise were waste of time. Of course, he had forgotten about the Derby. And so on. Still it was with a sense of relief that both men saw her leave the room. It annoyed Harry to think he had forgotten to rise to open the door for her. It redoubled his shyness, his embarrassment, his difficulty in making conversation with his host.

Errington found himself looking at Harry's clothes, beginning to get amused. What an awful outsider the fellow was! What an impossible person! How could the same blood run in his veins as ran in those of the

dainty Berenice? What the devil should he talk to the fellow about?

No, Harry did not play billiards. He did play cards, but this, of course, was the one thing Errington could not do, or, at least, had never attempted. The climate of Galatz? Oh, that was all right. Had he suffered from it? Well, he did not believe he was going to die yet, if that was what Mr. Kennard meant.

By the time it had come to this, the antipathy between the two was fairly started.

Errington took him up to the drawing-room, explained, in as charming a way as possible, that he had a business appointment, and wished him a cordial good-night.

That evening was typical of many that followed.

CHAPTER X

THE antipathy between the two men, did not reach its climax all at once. Errington made an honest attempt to get into touch with his wife's brother, and to find out what, if anything, lay behind the mask of sullenness, moroseness, or, as Berenice assured him, shyness, that made the man so impossible as a companion; but it became always more difficult.

Soon Harry was nothing but an incubus to Errington, a something unpleasant that made his home less and less congenial, that threw him always more definitely into the society of the Sphinx. Harry affected him in the same way as a big anthropoid ape would have done; his ugliness, his uncouth movements, made constant inroads on Errington's temper, he even found Berenice's affection for her brother revolting. Errington said Harry was as difficult to talk to as if he had been an ape, and was hardly more human. He had always had this strange physical sensitiveness. Harry Annesley began to make Prince's Gate insupportable to its nominal master. The brilliant, genial Bohemian lawyer could make no headway against, or with, this surly watcher on the threshold, and, of course, did himself injustice in his presence. It was difficult to make Berenice understand his feeling; it was much easier to talk about it to the Sphinx! He did go into his wife's bedroom one night, about three weeks after Harry's arrival, and start the subject.

"Look here, child, this man's your brother, or your half-brother," he began. And Berenice suddenly found her heart beating rather fast, and she gazed at her husband with startled eyes; for this was not his wonted manner. She quietly dismissed the maid. "I suppose you are bound to do what you can for him?" He went on walking about the room irritably. "But keep him out of my way. Don't you think you could persuade him to take quarters for himself? He has got on my nerves to such an extent that I can't eat when he is at the table. You have worked yourself up into thinking you are fond of him——"

"Oh, Errie," she interrupted.

Errington continued his restless peregrinations:

"But of course it's affectation—it's simple affectation. You must know, as well as I do, that the man's an absolute savage. Personally I don't know any society for which he is fit, but that it is not mine, I *do* know! He spoils the whole house for me! The very sight of his black, furtive face in any corner of the room where I am sitting, poisons the atmosphere."

But then her expression struck him, and he went over to her where she sat at her interrupted toilette, flung his arm about her, and kissed her gently.

Over her white dressing-jacket the bright luxuriance of her thick hair flowed without restraint. The loose collar showed the alluring softness, of her slender throat. The quick hurt of her quivering lips was as of a child. But the eyes, with the long lashes, were not a child's eyes. Their dark blue was too steady and deep; it was a woman's soul that shone through them.

"How the deuce there can be any blood tie between you, is what puzzles me," he said. "But, Berenice"

(this half pleadingly), "for your own sake, as well as for mine, get rid of him. I am a curious fellow. Recollect there is a side of me of which you have seen nothing yet. This man provokes all the worst that is in me. I've grown to loathe the sight of him."

"You want to tell me that if you saw the shadow of a likeness between us, you might come to dislike me too?" she interrupted, smiling; "but, of course, I don't believe it." Still her smile had been a faint one, and her quivering lips had paled.

"I couldn't do that. There is not a trace of him about you," he said hastily; "but a man cannot help his nature. Physical sensitiveness is an ingrained vice with me." He took her hand. "Look at that little white hand of yours! How on earth can you put it into that hairy fist of his? How can you let him kiss you, with his unshaven lips? How can you sit in the same room with him, and hear the way he breathes, see the way he moves, listen to what he says, gather what he thinks, and go on with the same placid equanimity of temper? You don't like him, you can't like him! Berenice, if I were to admit that my opinion of you will suffer if you tell me that you find any point in common, any link that binds you to him, what would you say to me?"

He lifted her off the chair, took her on his knee. Because she loved him, she did not quite believe him, but thought he was speaking out of the irritation of the moment. She nestled closer to him. Her love for him was very reticent, but it was also very passionate and complete. She trusted his love for her, and, of course, did not know, and could not know, the unreliability of his nervous system.

"I should tell you the truth, Errie, dear, and risk it," she said, hiding her affection against his shoulder. "I should tell you that I was really, really fond of him. He is awfully good and kind to me; he is not like himself with you. He is shy. You don't know what his life has been out there—I do, and I make a dozen excuses for him. And then, you see, he was really badly treated by my father. When father brought my mother home, and he saw Harry growing fond of her, he got jealous. Oh, it is a horrid story!" She nestled closer to him. "Harry was only a boy, and there was no home left for him. He went away when he was only eighteen, and lived abroad for five-and-twenty years. You and he will get to know each other, I know that. We don't really think differently about Harry, or, at least, I am sure we should not, if you would only try to understand him, and not look only on the surface."

"My dear, it's such a shockingly ugly surface."

"Don't, Errie!"

The scent of her hair, and her slenderness against him, calmed his mood, he forgot to press home his point, that she must get rid of her brother.

"Well, I suppose the time will come when there will be no black shadow between me and your beauty," he said, as he held her closer.

"Do you still think me beautiful?" she answered, somewhat wistfully, after a pause for endearments. "Don't you see Harry's features reflected in mine?"

"I can't say I do—not even in your eyes, though he must have looked into them often! You know this half-brotherhood is a dangerous thing. He is as nearly in love with you as it is in the nature of the animal."

"Don't say such horrid things, dear!"

"I won't. I will only think them." He pressed her head against his shoulder, and sent a light kiss thrilling through her hair.

"Don't you think you are a very brave woman? Don't you think there is a certain risk in all this freedom you are giving? For the last three months it has been you and Harry, with Errington as a bad second. Now, you know, little woman, that is not my *métier*. Don't hide your face; you are to look at me, straight in the eyes. Is this going on? I'm not jealous, don't misunderstand me. In the ordinary acceptation of the word no woman could make me jealous."

Then he changed his voice, and its tone was lighter. "But, in order to keep me straight, don't you know, I want a great deal of attention? You have withdrawn your attention; suppose I were to wander a little."

She laughed happily at that.

"I am not afraid."

And quite suddenly he knew she was right. His days of wandering were over. A little way, a little way he might go, but this was the only woman in the world for him; one that trusted him, asked nothing believed in him.

It was singular that Berenice had such clearness of perception where her brother was concerned, and that she should be a little obtuse regarding her husband. He was shrouded from her always by the thick curtain of her love.

Because her husband was so sweet to her that night, she thought he repented of his unkindness of thought towards her brother. Because her husband was so perfect in her eyes, and they, she and he, were so completely happy together, she thought it right to be even

more tenderly solicitous of poor Harry; the hint that by devoting herself to him she jeopardised her position with Errington, she could not heed. Had he not shown her, even in the same breath, how securely she held his love? And he had friends, pursuits, a thousand interests; Harry had nothing. Always more of her time and sympathy she gave her brother, and listened to his growing confidences.

She heard of that strangely isolated life he had led for five-and-twenty self-centred years in Galatz, ever within sight of the brooding chain of the Carpathians.

Galatz lies along the river bank. To the river it owes means of existence, its *raison d'être* as a town, its position in the world's commerce. On its frontage are ships discharging and ships loading, foreign agencies, German, Italian, Greek, French; timber-yards and wharves.

Harry, who was tongue-tied in the presence of Errington, conveyed to his sister a vivid picture of the place in which he had spent his days. That river front was tumultuous with transit, a restless, energetic going and coming, was ever at war with the dull stagnation of the Danubian waters.

Harry Annesley represented the only British firm that had had the enterprise to establish a warehouse, a bank, a definite import and export station, in the polyglot port. He felt pride in relating how that business grew and extended under his direction, opened branches, and absorbed into itself the best mercantile energies of Roumania.

He took to himself no credit that he did not fully and absolutely deserve. He had made his home in the shabby, ill-built, ill-managed town, but its traditional civic inertia was not disturbed by him. The unpaved

roads, alternating mud and dust, the dilapidated houses of brick, faced with crumbling terra cotta, the streets lighted with oil-lamps, unsafe, unsavoury, and unkempt, owed nothing to his residence there. To make money for Messrs. Fendell and Company, and, incidentally, for himself, was the be-all and end-all of the utilitarian part of his life. It was for that he had come, and he had accomplished it with indomitable industry, with incorruptible integrity, with undeniable ability.

He had worn through the severe winters, the hot, oppressive summers, and forgotten what spring was like. He had withstood, though not quite harmlessly, the cold easterly winds that blow over the vast plains of Asiatic Russia, killing off in their hundreds the Roumanian peasants in their half-subterranean hovels. He had suffered without complaint his isolation from civilisation in the midst of political unrest, and the constant menace of European complications.

For five-and-twenty years he had watched the harvests grow and ripen, and seen the big ships, laden with their rich freights, glide grandly down the Danube on the way to England. Without impost or check, the golden store, harvested from a soil that hardly needs the plough, was poured on to our English shores, and our unhappy English farmers, handicapped by storm and difficulty, were hurried downhill on their road to ruin by the avalanche Harry's hands had precipitated. But his outlook was quite narrow and bounded by his ambition. His mind lay barren in ledgers and account books.

He had grown rich, and always richer. He had become a partner where he had been an office boy. He had risen steadily, slowly, surely, in the place for which he had been marked out.

But, in truth, his rise was merely material. If there had been an intellectuality to cultivate, it remained uncultivated. In Galatz there were no books, there were no companions, there was no motive to raise his life from the sordidness in which he had gradually, perhaps somewhat from force of circumstances, immersed himself.

Thus far his history was all clear reading. What Berenice had to do in order to understand him, was to penetrate beyond it, into the man himself. There she would have found the clue to his tendency to moroseness, his infelicity in his attitude towards his equals, his lack of geniality and tact. He had made no friends amongst the easy happy-go-lucky, kindly and hospitable householders, by whom he was surrounded. He had made few even amongst the well-to-do merchants or traders with whom he might have been expected to consort. The consciousness of his scanty education, the remembrance of his cramped and narrow early years, and a deeper consciousness of moral unfitness, to which he sometimes vaguely alluded, had made him shrink from society.

The detail of his moral unfitness he had not fully confided to his sister. He had kept comparatively silent, too, over the episode in his career that marked its inception.

They sat and talked in the morning while Berenice worked; they drove together, talking, in the afternoons. And many evenings when Errington went out, with a graceful apology and allusion to "business appointments," they had continued the conversation, which to Harry, at least, never proved tedious. Berenice became gradually cognisant that there had been an incident in

his life to which much that was, and had been, unsatisfactory in it was to be attributed, and, gradually too, she was made aware of the crude outline of that incident.

Ten years ago, it appeared, her brother had gone from Galatz on a rare holiday to Bucharest. There he had met another representative of Messrs. Fendell and Company, who was travelling on business; and this man, a freckled and carrotty German, under-sized, inferior, unpleasant, had been accompanied by a graceful and beautiful wife.

Berenice was so sympathetic, Harry so unused to the unwonted luxury of a *confidante*, that he was unable to conceal from her the way in which this couple had affected him. The man was so vulgar, crude, impossible; the woman so attractive, superior, fascinating. He did not disguise that he had conceived a sudden and uncontrollable passion for his colleague's wife. It became obvious that he believed she fully responded to it. The month in Bucharest had been made memorable to both of them by what had occurred. Finally, she had left her husband, and gone with him when he returned to Galatz. Then came the tragedy. After a week of rapture her husband had followed.

Berenice could not completely comprehend the position. To take such a step as Elsa Beethoven had taken, and then to repent it, seemed to her incredible. Briefly, Elsa Beethoven had surveyed the possibilities of life with Harry Annesley in this out-of-the-way place, and had accepted the forgiveness that her husband had offered her conditionally on her return with him to England. When the moment for decision arrived, she had talked emotionally of her children. Harry, then

and always, truly believed she was sacrificing herself and him for her children. He could not oppose her conscientious scruples, his own conscience would not permit it. But it was his first, last, only, glimpse of the ideal. He had loved her with the best that was in him, given her up when he thought that was her highest demand upon him, become for her sake unselfish, even fine.

It was a blurred picture wanting illumination, the lights and shades needed touching in by a master-hand. Errington could have effected this, no doubt; those that his wife put in, made it rather grotesque. But then, Berenice saw Elsa Beethoven as Harry had seen her at the moment; a woman, ill-wedded in her youth, sacrificing the love that came to her in her maturity for her duty to her marriage vow and her children.

For Harry, although Errington found him so coarse, although the artificial refinements of life were new to him, had that in him which prevented him letting his sister thoroughly realise what had been his relations with Mrs. Beethoven. There were episodes that were sacred to Harry. Berenice's mind did not take her beyond that which was told her.

In any case, she was desperately sorry that her brother had been in love with a married woman. It seemed very sad and painful to her, she was wonderfully tender over him. When he let her realise that his life in Galatz, after Elsa Beethoven had left him had not been one upon which he could look back with unalloyed pride, she could but sympathise with him. Her mind was pure, she asked for no details, and dreamt of none.

In truth, Harry did not want her to know more than he had told her. For, unhappily, with all his morose-

ness and unsociable temper, he had, after the Beethoven incident, discovered in himself, as he grew in physical strength and material prosperity, that which, when it occurs in artists is called "a temperament," but which, when it is merely the expression of the common desires of common men, is condemned as "a taste for dissipation." And Galatz offered many opportunities. If it were possible to make a scale of towns graduated according to their immorality, Galatz would figure out a degree or two lower than Budapest.

Harry Annesley's dissipations added nothing to his happiness. His tastes and his desires were ever at war with his character. It was a battle-ground of opposing forces, and all his days were full of shamed and defeated resolutions.

Ingrained in him, notwithstanding his appetites, was a certain puritanism, a certain ineradicable, if inarticulate, yearning for a wholly British respectability. His ever-growing aggressiveness, his distrust of his fellow-men, was merely the outcome of the war between his passions and his prejudices. He disliked those who succumbed to his own temptations; the excuses he found for himself never fitted *their* cases. He distrusted too, those who had never fallen, suspecting them of a reticence even greater than his own.

A constant succession of the most sordid entanglements alternated with his serious business hours. No man could grow amidst such surroundings as Annesley gathered about him.

When, at length, the time came for him to leave Galatz, he decided that he would turn a new page in his history when he reached England. Once his face was set for home, the strands that bound him to his

baser self would be sundered. In England he would be out of sight of the pitfalls into which he had stumbled, he would make his final emergence from the *ego* that lay behind his fine commercial record, as the dirty town lay behind the utilitarian frontage, and the clean river causeway.

He thought he had closed the book of the life which lay behind him when the vessel steamed from the Danube into the Black Sea, and that there would be no woman, in the days that were before him, but the dear half-sister who would welcome his home-coming.

But he reckoned without the factors. A series of coincidences made all his plans for a new life abortive. Incidentally, of course, he had not reckoned with the antipathy which had so rapidly arisen between himself and his sister's husband.

For many days after that conversation with his wife, Errington avoided the subject of Harry. But he also avoided his companionship; and that meant avoiding his home. The strange terrible death the Sphinx was so slowly dying still left her rare intervals of brilliant intuition and social capacity. One of these intervals synchronising with Harry's sojourn at Prince's Gate, Errington was able to spend his spare time with her. It was not unnatural that she fostered his ill-humour with his brother-in-law's presence, seeing that she gained through it the companionship which meant so much to her.

She grew less Sphinx-like in those days, more human. She showed Errington more of her heart. Perhaps she felt her isolation from tenderness, from woman friends. Her pride had bled to death, it was a pale and attenuated thing now; she could let Errington see its linger-

ing throbs of death agony. He was infinitely moved by her, and could deny her nothing.

It is more than possible he would have spoken to Berenice of his visits to Hans Crescent, enlisting her sweet and ready sympathy; but, like all sensitive persons, his confidential moments were few, spasmodic, difficult. And Harry was always to the fore.

The moment when matters reached their inevitable climax between the two men was unfortunate; but that it was inevitable is clear.

It had been the Kennards' habit to celebrate their wedding anniversary with a dinner and reception, and this year was to be no exception to the rule. Errington, for once, looked forward with no pleasure to the function. Harry's presence had really become an obsession with him. Genial and brilliant host as he had always been, Harry cramped and paralysed his efforts.

Already, to-night, when he entered the drawing-room, his fine head and tall figure shown off by his studied evening-dress, the expanse of white shirt with its be-gemmed studs, the double-breasted white waistcoat, with its jewelled buttons, accentuating his remarkable personality, his sense of well-being was jarred by the sight of Harry Annesley, uncouth, on the hearthrug, with his ill-fitting clothes, and square-toed, hideous patent boots.

"Who's coming to-night?" Harry asked, without moving. "You're rather 'got up' aren't you? All nobs, I suppose."

"A few friends of my wife's and mine," answered Errington stiffly. "I am sorry you don't approve my clothes. I suppose Galatz rather rarefied your taste."

"Only the foreigners wore jewellery. Those buttons

of yours, now—I wouldn't wear them if you gave me a hundred pounds."

"Your disapproval distresses me." Errington knew he was unduly irritated, that Harry Annesley's opinion did not matter; but he could not control his annoyance.

"Oh! I don't mind." Harry meant to be soothing, and friendly. The antipathy was chiefly on Errington's side. "It only struck me as you came in that you looked rather showy. Anything in the papers?"

"Nothing about grain."

"Harry, to whom Errington's type of sensitiveness was completely unknown, had no conception of the strength of the other's dislike of him. Had he known, he would have been unable to realise how purely physical it was at source. For himself, he admired the lawyer's good looks and *aplomb*, although he was beginning to notice his frequent absences from home. What he knew of the ugly side of life made him quickly suspicious. Errington had admitted to him one day, that, when he went out of an evening, it was to visit a lady client. Already he was making up his mind to speak to Errington about it, to give him his experiences, to utter a warning word!

To the implication that, if there was nothing in the papers about grain, there was nothing that could interest him, he made the rejoinder that it was as well to be interested in grain as in women. He thought that was a delicate way of beginning the subject.

"Well, I should not think that women had ever interested you greatly!" Errington replied insolently, with intention.

Harry's red face grew a little redder. It is an accusation every man resents, but Harry did not resent it.

He began a confused rejoinder that was meant to lead up to that warning word, when the entrance of Berenice interrupted him.

Berenice was exquisite in white satin, and rose point. Her beauty filled both men with pride and satisfaction, and arrested and diverted their attention from each other.

"Paquin?" asked Errington, advancing to meet her.

"That's a fine dress," said Harry admiringly.

"I am glad you like it. It came from Jay's."

She answered both men at once. There were pearls intertwined in the coils of her radiant hair, the white dress with its delicate *décolletage* revealed her creamy throat and bust; a rope of pearls, Harry's wedding present, and a filmy Cartier brooch, were all the jewels she wore. She moved about the drawing-room, as if she were in homespun, touching a flower here, altering a vase there, talking lightly the while about her day's occupations, making the whole atmosphere home-like.

It was a beautiful drawing-room now; the walls were painted transparently, the colour of jade, a few rare landscapes by Hokusai and Ontamaro hung upon them, uncrowded and unique. On the lac cabinets were Ming bowls, holding each a few tall lilies, without foliage. The electric light was softened and concealed, the black draperies hung, simple and severe, as backgrounds to brilliant embroideries, and cushions of flowered *crêpe*. There was no flaw in the taste of the room, and it was unlike any other. It had its distinct, its characteristic, expression. On quaint-carved tables were Buddhas in gold, and in bronze, and jade, in all sizes and postures, a collection which had taken Errington half a lifetime to bring together.

"Why do you have these heathen gods about? They are very ugly, out of keeping in a London drawing-room. I wish you'd let me refurnish this room for you. I have never given you a proper wedding present, Kennard. I passed Waring's to-day, and that made me think of it. I went in and saw some of the rooms they had got up. What do you say!"

Fortunately Harry did not hear what Errington said, for the guests had begun to arrive. Soon the room was full, and everybody was talking, the note of gaiety was struck at once. It was a new world to Harry, he resented its smartness, its up-to-date manner and epigram, its ease and free-masonry of understanding. He felt an outsider amongst these people.

Berenice had arranged for him to take Lady Melrose into dinner, and Lady Melrose was a little deaf. A continuous trickle of society small-talk saved her from the trouble of trying to listen to what was said to her. But, in the intervals whilst she ate, Harry found his opportunities to blunder.

Across the table decorations, the white Sèvres figures, holding trailing branches of smilax and pink roses, the Georgian candlesticks with their grey wide shades, across all that exquisite napery, cut glass, and antique silver, Errington heard Harry's raised and guttural voice. Words and sentences penetrated, presently it seemed to him as if the whole table was hushed to listen to his incongruous brother-in-law.

Harry had said that he knew nothing, and cared less, about racing, that he thought Kruger had been quite right in making a stand against the encroachments of the Englishmen, that the test match did not interest him, cricket was a stupid game, and football worse;

why weren't school-boys taught French and German, instead of wasting their time?

Errington heard all this. Lady Melrose kept on her fixed society smile, the amiable acquiescent smile of the cultured deaf, and apparently agreed with all that he said. And Harry felt that he was "getting on all right."

Unfortunately, Lady Melrose's conversational *repertoire* included current literature, the literature of the bookstalls and weekly papers. They were at the stage of ices when Errington's nerves gave a premonitory shiver, as he heard her say:

"Have you read his posthumous book?—everybody is talking about it. Shockin', isn't it? So sad too! I was at the first night of *Lady Chiselmores Lace Coat*. We thought we were goin' to be bored. He was so clever. And really clever people never can write books or plays, can they? It's like expectin' tradesmen to play Bridge, so incongruous. But Algernon never was like anybody else. This book now—did you say you had read it?"

"No. I haven't read the book, nor seen the play, and don't want to. I'm surprised you mentioned Algernon Heseltine's name."

"What? I beg your pardon. What did you say?" She bent more forward to listen. "I am a little deaf," she said.

Across the table, every one heard the harsh voice reply:

"I said the man and his works were unmentionable. They and he ought to have been burned by the common hangman."

Of course Errington should have held his peace, the

observations were not addressed to him, he had no right to interfere.

"Do you mind, Annesley, not speaking of Algernon Heseltine, in that way, here? He was a friend of mine."

Errington's voice was ominous, his eyes were dangerous.

"Then you oughtn't to admit it. I maintain my opinion. It's an outrage on decency to mention his name, he ought to have been burnt at the stake." Harry forgot the occasion, and his audience.

The whole spirit and tone of conviviality were spoiled. For a moment a dead silence reigned. Everybody knew Kennard's connection with the Heseltine case, by tacit consent no one had talked of it since his marriage. The years had gone by since Algernon suffered, and died. It was the fashion now to ignore everything of Algernon Heseltine but his talents. Harry's speech broke every one of the social conventions, it was ill-timed, aggressive, unnecessary.

Berenice, with her instinctive tact, threw herself into the gap of silence and made a move, although dessert was only just being handed round, and the coffee had not made its appearance.

The rustle of skirts, the sound of the chairs being pushed back, the bustle and circumstance of the ladies' departure, cut short whatever rejoinder Errington might have been tempted to make. But, in the glance she took at him, Berenice recognised the danger signal in his eyes. As he held the door open, she found opportunity to smile deprecatingly, to say under her breath, "Harry did not know you knew him;" she was alarmed by the want of response.

When the men took their seats again, round the disordered table, moving nearer to each other in customary sociability, Errington made an effort to appear as if nothing had happened. He took hurried part in the talk that immediately started, of the coming election, and the Conservative chances. He wanted to avert a scene, and yet was conscious of a momentary want of self-control.

But Harry Annesley, satisfied of the justice of his sentiments, convinced of their popularity, glad, perhaps, of the opportunity of proving himself able to join in general conversation with these smart friends of the Kennards, was not to be suppressed.

He addressed his host, for all the friends of his brother-in-law were strangers to him.

"You know I'm right about Algernon Heseltine, Kennard, even if you did meet him once or twice; Lady Melrose couldn't have known what she was talking about. This book ought never to have been published. I haven't read it, but I'm sure it's disgusting and filthy."

"If you had a millionth part of Algernon Heseltine's genius, you might venture to sit in judgment on him."

Errington's voice had grown harsh, and the red spot in each cheek had deepened, but he struggled to keep himself in hand. Sir John Desmond intervened, he was an old man, but distinguished, one who was listened to with respect on all subjects in any audience. He said slowly, gazing through his glasses at Harry:

"There is no human error, no human crime, that is, or should be, outside human sympathy. Heseltine's sanity was more than doubtful. He had, too, an un-

fortunate family history, and ineradicable hereditary predispositions. He suffered very bitterly——”

“A thousand times more than an ordinary man,” interpolated Lord Melrose, who knew how it was with his host.

“More than an ordinary man,” accepted Sir John, “his expiation was very complete. We can safely pay him our tribute of pity.”

Harry rose, or sank, to the occasion.

“I don’t agree with you. He was an outrage and a horror, no punishment could have been sufficiently severe for him. I am surprised to hear decent men taking his part. I don’t know what sort of company I’m in. . . .”

A sort of murmur went round the table, one or two men half rose:

“Whatever company you are in,” said Errington, the flush very pronounced, the light in his eyes flaming, “would very gladly dispense with yours.”

“What do you mean? I don’t know what you mean?” Harry rose too.

“I mean you have insulted me, my guests, my friends. Now you may go. I’ll have no man eat at my table who bespatters the memory of my dead friend.” His emotion almost overpowered his speech.

Harry, dumfounded, faced him with astonished eyes; he was enchained momentarily by the other’s magnetic personality, caught in the whirlwind of a passion to the source of which he had no clue.

“You can’t mean what you say, you can’t mean you think differently from all men about Algernon Heseltine; it’s incredible, I can’t believe it.” He looked round the table for the sympathy he still expected.

"I mean I cannot, and will not, sit any longer in the same room with you." Errington forgot his guests, and committed his first and last breach in the laws of hospitality. He had been standing, now he went to the door.

"Will you go; or shall I?" he said, flinging it open. The concentration of his rage made his voice low. Harry, almost unconsciously, had moved slowly towards him, and now it was a question which should yield, which of those two men facing each other should go through that open door. Harry Annesley was used to tempestuous dealings with excitable foreigners, he was a big man, and no coward.

"You will be sorry for this Kennard," he said, quite quietly, "you will be sorry when you come to yourself. You turn me from your house on account of a . . ."

But the word never passed his lips.

"You . . . you dare to say it!"

Harry's hand was on the door now.

"Very well, I'll not say it, I'll go."

He gained rather than lost in dignity of bearing, although he was ordered out of his brother-in-law's house, turned from his table ignominiously.

It was Errington who was ashamed when the door was closed behind Harry, and he was left to face his guests. He could not quickly regain his self-possession, although almost before he began to realise how ill he had behaved to his other guests, to himself, the traces had been covered up with convention. Every one had begun to talk at once, and unanimously, of other things, the flavour of the cigars was commented upon, and the crops compared with those before the war.

Stephen Deane related one of his Cuban adventures, and Sir John resumed his election gossip. Presently, Errington recovered himself sufficiently to support them; but everyone was glad to join the ladies.

It was a most unfortunate and awkwardly timed incident. The talk would be all over London to-morrow; how some one had attacked Algernon Heseltine at the Kennards', and how the lawyer had defended him. These things never sleep, it was impossible to expect ten men to keep a secret. Public opinion would be in Harry's favour, public opinion and private so seldom coincide. The "unspeakable," "indefensible" attitude that Annesley had taken up would be the one that would find sympathy. Errington had jeopardised his chance for the Kent constituency to-night. He knew that, remembered it when the last of their guests had departed, and he and Berenice were alone in their beautiful strange room.

"Have you seen your brother yet?" he began.

"No, he didn't come upstairs with the others. Where is he, is there anything the matter with him? You haven't quarreled? Oh! Errie!"

"I turned him out of the room; I suppose he has had the decency to leave the house."

"Turned him out of the room?"

"It was bound to come to it."

"My—my brother!—your—your guest!"

How could he justify himself to her, or to himself? Yet his temper was hardly calmer, his irritation no less acute. He fell into silence. How could he expect his wife to understand how he felt about Algernon Heseltine? There was only one woman who could understand him, who had ever understood him.

"No one shall speak ill of Algernon Heselton in my house."

"But Harry did not know. Where is he now? What has become of him?"

She was uncertain of her words, her thoughts. Her heart went out to Harry, turned out of the house, his sister's house. Yet Errington could do no wrong. She was his wife, and would support whatever he did. She tried to say so, but her agitation made it so difficult to speak. Errington must know she would support him. But over Harry, in his disgrace, she yearned already, poor friendless Harry!

Errington was in no mood to discuss himself, or Harry, with Berenice. It was the Sphinx he wanted, who would understand without words; Berenice's emotion only annoyed him, her pallor and dismay were all for her abominable brother. The knowledge of his own unpardonable conduct made it impossible to forgive her dismay.

"I am going out for an hour, I can't discuss it," he said abruptly; "don't sit up for me. Good-night!"

But she had not meant to discuss. Did he not know that whatever he did would be right in her eyes? She only wanted time.

"I am sure he—he behaved badly——"

"I can't talk to-night." Already his heart failed him a little over the harshness of his words. "Let me go out, dear, I must be alone. God! How I hate the fellow! I can't talk."

He was out of the house, the street door had reverberated from his hurried exit, before she had found the words to tell him that whatever he had done or said, whether he had been in the right or the wrong, she was

his loving and loyal wife, she could not argue or question his conduct. She had not the words to tell him then, although she found them later.

For Harry she felt an overwhelming pity. She knew, whatever he had said, whatever had occurred, he had meant no harm. She was sorry for him, she pictured him, quite truly, immeasurably distressed and bewildered.

But Errington was her heart's lord, and her heart followed him into the night.

CHAPTER XI

THE Sphinx was fully sympathetic. Errington could not tell her exactly what had occurred, but it was not difficult for her to divine it, and him. She could always fall in with his moods; her influence over him, and over all men, had its explanation in her capacity for sinking her individuality into theirs, for making herself a magic mirror in which they saw their virtues magnified, their faults blurred and insignificant. She made Errington note his own fine and unswerving loyalty; whilst he was with her he saw nothing else.

But, in the week that followed the dinner-party, he had his alternate moods. In common with many men whose hearts and brains are antagonistic, he found it difficult to reconcile his conduct with either of them. Berenice, notwithstanding that she had her own difficulties to surmount, subordinated them to his. She saw he was out of tune, and tried to restore harmony to him. She was so purely and sweetly feminine, that she persuaded herself, and almost persuaded him, that he was out of health. The commissariat of the house, always good, was refined and elaborated, his appetite was tempted with turtle, and the town ransacked for delicacies, the cellars were made to yield up their rarities. His irritability was met with tenderness, with smiles that were almost caresses, that would have been caresses, but that she had tact as well as love.

He was quite conscious of the way he was being

treated, but it hardly made matters better for him. He had ever found it difficult to talk of what he most deeply felt. Only the Sphinx held the key to his speech. He was worse than dumb to Berenice, for his words were distorted words, born of his self-disgust. He was too innately hospitable not to resent his own conduct to Harry, but he was too human not to resent even more deeply that which had caused it. And, though he appreciated, and understood, all Berenice was trying to convey to him all through that difficult week, he could not, was literally unable to, open himself out to her. The words were strangled in his throat as they rose. The whole incident sickened him more and more in the retrospect, it must get itself forgotten in his house.

Berenice made her efforts, also brave efforts, to let him know her sympathy; but that also, even whilst he appreciated it, he resented. He shut himself up against her. Yet this was the very time he wanted her most, when she might have been of most use to him.

For, with the strange fatality of untoward circumstances, the claim of the past became a clamour this week, and, at his weakest, temptation under disguise, and with masked batteries, assailed him irresistibly.

It was two or three days after the dinner-party when he mentioned Harry to his wife. But they had been memorable days, and only half of him was at the breakfast-table when he asked Berenice:

"Well! have you seen your brother yet?"

"Yes, dear. Last night, when I heard you were not coming home, I went over to him. I told him I should tell you I had been. I hope you don't mind. I didn't find him well, or happy."

She was glad the silence was broken through, she wanted to tell him with whom her sympathies lay, to beg him not to shut her out of his confidence.

"Why shouldn't you see him? Why should I wish to prevent you seeing him? Gaze your fill on him, why not? Where has he gone? To the Zoo? I suppose he is in a cage marked *A Black Galatzian (very rare and fine)*, and the public are alternately feeding him with buns and prodding him with sticks."

"He has taken a furnished suite in the Albany," she answered simply, ignoring all but his question, anxious nevertheless not to change the topic.

"Why not Houndsditch?"

"He is really sorry that he vexed you."

"Oh, damn him and his sorrow."

"He has a nasty cough. I want him to go to Italy for the winter. I found him quite depressed."

Errington pushed his coffee cup away irritably. He had started the subject, but hated it.

"I suppose I must go down to Hurstbridge this afternoon. I wish I had never agreed to become a candidate. I'm so full up with work, I don't know where to turn," he said irrelevantly. She followed his lead:

"I saw Mr. Trefusis yesterday." (He was their election agent.) "He is very hopeful of your chance. He says none of them have heard you speak."

"He is an ass. Men do not vote one side or another because of a good or a bad speech."

"But you are so exceptional."

"I wish I had not agreed to stand."

She came round to him where he sat, put a wifely hand gently on his shoulder:

"Isn't the coffee good, dear? I wish you would try cocoa for a few mornings, or grape nuts, I am sure you are run down."

He settled himself in his chair, looking up at her, not unkindly:

"Why don't you leave me to myself?"

She laid a gentle kiss on his forehead.

"You are unhappy, and not very well. Isn't that reason enough?" she said.

"Let me get through my troubles in my own way, there's a dear girl. It isn't only the half-bred half-brother." He couldn't help hurting her, his nerves tricked him into it. "I've a great deal on my mind just now. Let me alone; that is the best thing for me, for you too. Of course, go and see him whenever you like. I've no feeling about it, only don't let him prejudice you against me, against us, or teach you his narrow views." He pulled her down to him, kissed her lightly, then dismissed the topic.

She began to speak, hesitated, left it unsaid. She busied herself a little about his breakfast, talking of new dishes that the *chef* must try for him.

Errington had, indeed, his mind and hands full.

At the instance of the Sphinx he had taken in hand a case which already presented itself full of difficulties. It was not his will to be ungracious to his wife. But in undertaking this new case which had been brought to him, he knew he was running counter to her interests, her best social interests. He wanted her countenance, but could not bring himself to ask for it.

It was what he had feared, it was the claim which the Sphinx—the past, had made, and was making. What he was doing was unfair. He could not be his normal

self to his wife, whilst he knew his action was unfair to her.

"Did he try to prejudice you against me?" he asked again.

"You know how impossible that would be," she said gently. "And so does he," she added softly.

"Then you admit he tried?" he asked, smiling satirically.

She hesitated again, but had the courage to reply frankly.

"I don't know for what crime Algernon Heseltine was convicted. You told me yourself, you recollect, before we were married, that every one who had been associated with him was suspect, treated as if they, too, were lepers. That is all Harry says, what you told me all the world said. He did not try to prejudice me against you, it would have been ridiculous."

Her colour rose at the very notion, and the hand on the back of his chair trembled, her heart beat a little faster than usual, she could not keep back from him a little doubt which had been in her mind, but which she had not let Harry see.

"But he did ask me to use my influence to keep you from going too often to see Sybil Heseltine, from being associated with her in the public mind. Mrs. Beethoven was with Harry; I think she had been talking to him of you and Algernon Heseltine, a horrid woman. She asked me to go and see her. She said you were an old friend of hers, that you had been with her all yesterday morning! She called you 'Errington,' and spoke of you as if you were her intimate——"

She could not go on. She had never questioned him, never been jealous of him; but she must not keep any-

thing back from him. Perhaps her voice was wistful, or the trembling hand conveyed to him that she asked for reassurance. He put his hand over hers.

"So you met Elsa Beethoven! How did she come to know your brother?"

"Her husband was with the Fendells years ago. Harry met her in Bucharest."

"Oh, yes, of course. I had forgotten. Beethoven travelled for the Fendells before he went on the Stock Exchange; horrible little cad, but not as bad as his wife."

She raised her head; he saw the sudden gladness in her candid eyes, and laughed at her:

"You little duffer. Did Elsa Beethoven really persuade you we were great friends?"

"Yesterday morning?"

"Yesterday morning! Ah! thereby hangs a tale. I've no time to tell you just now."

He rose, and glanced at the clock.

"I must be at your friend Elsa's by 10.30."

But he wouldn't tease her. Her face had fallen, and he was never cruel, only neurotic.

"She has a young fellow staying with her, a nephew by marriage. He has got into a bad scrape, and I'm trying to help him out. There, is that enough to reassure you? I don't go there to see Elsa Beethoven. She is a woman I completely detest. To pass her in the hall, and that, by the way, was all I saw of her yesterday morning, makes me shudder. She is a dangerous lying reptile of a woman; you may tell your brother so from me, if you like."

It was a thousand pities that Harry Annesley had chosen this particular psychological moment to open his batteries on Errington's position with the Hesel-

tines. The Kent election bothered him; it was so easy to throw mud, he wished now he had not allowed himself to be nominated. Yet he owed it to his wife to take advantage of his opportunities.

He wanted to tell Berenice about the Sphinx's claim. But Harry's ill-timed remonstrance and question made it impossible. He had been from home nearly all the week. How could he tell her just now in what manner he had spent his time? Yet what choice had he had, what possible choice?

This was the note that had been brought to him, the very morning after he had sought the Sphinx for comfort over his behaviour to Harry. Always she had given him sympathy, understanding; how could he refuse anything to her? He could never get free from the tie of the past.

"DEAR ERRINGTON,—Put everything aside and come to me. I must see you, don't delay. I want you to do something for me. You are so splendid, I know you won't hesitate, I depend upon you.

"Yours ever,

"SYBIL."

And, at the expense of his lunch hour, he had obeyed the summons.

"I knew you would come," she said, "dear Errington, you never fail me, do you?"

She was immobile on that sofa now. The paralysis had crept and crept, until from waist downwards she was already dead. But she was the same Sybil.

"You don't mind my not running downstairs to meet you, do you? Of course, it is fearfully inattentive. But there is more style, more dignity, in the reclining

position, don't you think? 'And this cushion is a new shade of blue. Do you find it suits my hair? Because, if not, I must try a new shade of hair; I can't part with the cushion. It's a piece of genuine old brocade, seventeenth century Italian. Brooking got it for me.'

He said all the right things, told her how well she was looking, how the cushion became her, noted the *famille verte* bowl full of scarlet peonies, which made a fine note of colour against the turquoise brocade, and he awaited her will to tell him why she had sent for him in such haste. Perhaps all that was best in Errington Welch-Kennard was the pity that dominated every other feeling in the hours that he spent with the poor Sphinx. Everything in him at such time was subordinate to the desire to be of service to her.

There was light conversation, with a few pauses, and then, quite abruptly, her face turned from him, she began:

"There was a police raid last night at a house in Portland Place. Kenny du Gore was there, but managed to get away, yet he thinks he was recognised."

He kept his seat, waiting for her to go on. But already he knew, he hated, the service that would be asked of him. He had read his morning papers.

"I sent Brooking this morning to—to find out things. They have not taken out a warrant."

"What do you want me to do?"

His voice was curiously low and still. He was back in the past, both of them were back in the past.

"Kenny must be got out of the country."

"Can't you let him take his chance?"

"No."

"Go on."

A mountain of difficulties rose before him, ugly, threatening, dangerous. It was difficult for Sybil to speak, yet there was much he must know. She went on, but her voice was not clear, he had to lay his head beside hers to listen.

"It was an accident, Kenny being there, I mean, he only went out of curiosity, *my* curiosity, I couldn't help it. I wanted to be certain. You know who betrayed Algernon, and repudiated him. You can guess how I hated his prosperity, his success, that *he* has got back."

She had tried to keep the curtain down, now she raised a corner, and he saw into her chamber of horrors.

"You heard?"

"I heard he was still playing a double part. Kenny offered to go and see. It was unfortunate the police should choose just that night, for he *was* there, Errington, he *was* there."

The light in the eyes she turned to him was terrible. For the man of genius had been broken on the wheel, and the man she had been tracking was the friend who bound him to it.

He tried to hush her, soothe her. It was all true, he had always known of its truth. But the public demand had been for one victim, and it was Algernon who had been broken.

"We can't revive it, we can't undo it. Oh! Sphinx, Sphinx, why can't you let it sleep?" he groaned.

"It is too late, too late, I know. But I sent Kenny there."

She lay quiet, tried to quiet herself. It was of Kenny du Gore she would speak, of the son of General du Gore, whom she had encouraged to his ruin. That was her

responsibility, all at once she had been seized with terror at what she had done, with fear of what might happen. Kenny must not suffer as Algernon had suffered. She could not bear it.

"You must get him away," she said.

"But you are not even sure that he was recognised. In any case, let us wait until they issue a warrant."

"Then it will be too late. I can't bear it, make him get away at once, to-day, to Spain. He can have any money he wants, only make him go."

She noticed his want of response.

"Will it hurt you to do this? No one but you could do it. He must be warned, frightened, persuaded. He is obstinate and—innocent. Tell me if it will do you any harm. But no one need know."

"Have I ever put myself or my interests before anything you have asked me to do for you?"

"I am so glad always in your prosperity. And then there is your election." She could play on him, knowing every sensitive string of his generosity. "No, you must not risk it. I had forgotten everything. But, oh! Errington—if—if he should be arrested! How could I go through it all again?"

"Of course not," he answered quickly. "It's not to be thought of."

"It was all my fault. I wanted to know."

The resolution he had come to, not quite quickly, but definitely, lit up his face.

"It's all right, dear, I'll take it in hand."

"You—won't hurt yourself?"

"I'll take no risks I am not compelled to take. Where is he now?"

"He is at the Beethovens'. He ran away, years ago,

with a little Jewish girl from Tottenham Court Road, a niece of Elsa Beethoven."

"Married? Is Kenny married?"

"Yes; but they are not living together. There has been some trouble or other between them lately. This is her great chance, the chance of a lifetime!" Then her voice broke: "Oh! God! If I could have done it, when *my* chance came, if I had not been struck down like this!"

And the old anguish tore at her. When she could have stood by her husband's side, helping him, the hand of God had swept her aside. Whilst the waves were engulfing him, she lay broken and speechless. She had her great part to play, and had played it perforce in a darkened room, without an audience, to an orchestra of pain. She had to pause, the poignant bitterness of it never slept.

Against his inclination, against all his better judgment, Errington was persuaded into promising to get Kenny du Gore quickly out of the jurisdiction of the English Courts. He had tried to get Algernon away, but Algernon himself had balked him. He had brought obloquy upon himself, and failed in his objective. He had lived it all down, and now again he must risk his reputation. But the Sphinx left him no choice. She had even arranged detail. Errington was to fetch Sam Beethoven from his club, and Sam would take him to Kenny.

"I can't meet that woman," he objected. "You know, Sphinx, the trouble I had with her before, how difficult she was to get rid of. And now you ask me to go to her house."

"I thought of that, that is all arranged, you are not

to see her. She promised Brooking she would keep out of your way."

All of it was disagreeable to Errington. He would so much have preferred not to have anything to do with the case, but the Sphinx's terrible anxiety seemed to leave him no option.

He went without his lunch. He drove to the Piccadilly Club to meet Sam Beethoven.

The Piccadilly was not a first-class club. It would perhaps be unfair to the Union, the Devonshire, or the Wellington, to call it second-rate. Errington, who, since his marriage, and the inception of his parliamentary ambitions, had been elected a member of the Carlton, rather smiled as he mounted the steps. After he had asked for Sam, and the club servant had gone to look for him, he found himself surrounded by men whose manners and conversation were all strange to him. He knew many worlds, but the world of second-rate sport was not one of them. Here about him, were racing men, pigeon shooters, gamblers hard-featured, close-lipped, indefinitely vulgar. It was whilst he was wondering from what under-world the members of this strange club emanated, that he was jarred into consciousness by an outstretched flabby hand, and a voice he knew well, but disagreeably.

"So you have come at last. I vos just going home without you, he is so impatient, that neffew-in-law of mine. I have not seen you for five years or more; isn't it? Not since you were married. Dot vos a fine marriage you did! Mrs. Beethoven and myself vos pleased about it. Oh yes! bygones is bygones with Mrs. Beethoven and me! She is a good woman. A pretty kettle of fish! Kenny du Gore vos in that house in

Portland Place last night. Manny Henry did a great thing for his daughter wif that fine marriage! You come home with me. You shall hear all about it."

Errington could not help his stiffening of manner. To shake hands with Sam Beethoven had always been an effort to him. Sam was carroty, wore whiskers, was not over clean in his person, and was on the Stock Exchange; everything he most disliked. His proximity in the hansom was unpleasant. Sam spluttered and talked the whole time. What he ignored, and what he forgot of the past, made him ultra abominable.

"A nice mess," he kept saying, "a nice mess Manny made for his daughter wif her fine marriage. You don't come to see us now. You've grown too grand for us. But I hear of you, I hear of you in de papers. Mrs. Beethoven, she cuts out the paragraphs, pastes them in a book. She has not forgotten you."

This made the prospect no pleasanter.

Arrived at that familiar house in the Wedderburn Road, he could not but feel that his past degraded him. The mere recognition of the attempts Elsa had made to follow, to please, his tastes, made him shudder inwardly.

Sam took him into the drawing-room, and said he would send Kenny to him there. The drawing-room was tawdry with Empire furniture, bearing upon it the stamp of Birmingham, with old Italian pictures painted yesterday, cracked china with only the cracks to excuse it.

He could not wait in the drawing-room. He endured it for two or three minutes, until the two cupids and a nude woman, labelled "Rubens," which was the masterpiece in Elsa's collection of old masters, drove him into the hall. There, of course, he ran against Elsa, prepared for the emergency.

She greeted him with outstretched hands, a little mannered moan, dropped eyelids—her willowy figure bending. In the dim light of the hall she thought her years would be hidden, she had laid her little plan of campaign, but his impatience had defeated her intention. It was true that she had promised the Sphinx's delegate she would keep out of the lawyer's way; but pledges count for nothing with a woman like Elsa Beethoven.

"Oh!" she said, "at last. We meet again." Each phrase was pumped out as if her emotion almost stifled her. "Speak to me, tell me you have not quite forgotten ze past—ze past is not dead viz you, when you come to my poor house."

He was annoyed at the encounter.

"Oh! I've forgotten nothing. Where is that young nephew of yours? I can't wait for him all day."

"But a little minute first for me, von little moment. Come into ze dining-room, zere ve shall be alone. Sam vill find Kenny in time, in good time. In ze dining-room, where you vill remember——"

"I remember nothing. My mind is a blank about everything but the immediate purpose of my mission here. Don't sentimentalise, there's a good woman. Get hold of that boy, and bring him to me. There's no time to waste." He was quite brutally frank, knowing Elsa, and her love of drama, hating her, and all her ways.

"But ze past," she moaned, "when ve vere so happy togezzer."

"The past, my dear woman, is as dead as a door nail. I'm glad to hear from Sam that you and he are getting on so well. I hope you make him a good wife now.

You ought to, you know, he has behaved very well to you."

She covered her chagrin as well as she was able, under a little affected laugh, and assurance that Sam still thought himself lucky that she remained with him! Kenny came downstairs at this moment, fortunately, ending the interview.

Errington had not realised that Elsa had the will, and might have the power, to revenge herself for his contemptuous indifference. If he had realised it, it would, perhaps, not have altered his conduct.

Kenny du Gore had been an *habitué* of the Hans Crescent coterie ever since he was a subaltern at Sandhurst. Errington recollected him at the last of the memorial suppers he had attended before his marriage. But the flushed and drunken boy he remembered, erect and alert, bore little resemblance to this poor flabby figure. Errington had disliked the insolent handsome lad. But no one could dislike anything so abject as Kenny du Gore showed himself when they were together in that tawdry drawing-room, he could hardly hold himself erect. In fact, the first words he said were:

"Do you mind if I sit down?" He had not attempted to shake hands with the lawyer. "Have they issued a warrant? Do you know if they've issued a warrant?" he went on.

He looked as if he had been already sentenced, there was no manhood left in him.

"I don't know what I ought to do. You will help me, won't you? The Sphinx promised you would. It was all her fault, you know. She says herself it was all her fault."

He did not go the right way to secure Errington's

sympathies. Whatever fate was in store for him, it was fairly certain he deserved it. But the Sphinx's anguish over him could not be ignored nor set aside.

Kenny had had as much champagne as was good for him already this morning, but he was unable to go through the interview without ringing for more.

The lawyer wrung from him slowly, and with difficulty, all the circumstances of the raid, of his escape. It was all very sordid, ugly, and disgraceful, but Errington began to see his way. He tried to explain the position to Kenny, and Kenny was quite capable of understanding an explanation. This one abounded in legal technicalities. Five of the men who were at the house in Portland Place had been arrested on the spot. The charge against them was easily formulated. The peer whom Kenny had been sent to watch had got safely away. Powerful influences would be employed again, as they had been employed before, in securing his safety. An honoured name was involved, far-reaching interests; and Kenny would benefit indirectly. Kenny too, had not been "found on the premises"; the jargon was all at Errington's finger ends. The network of the criminal law has a wide mesh, and through it Kenny might well escape. But, pending events, he must get out of England. Of this the lawyer had no doubt, and, notwithstanding the Sphinx's warning, he had little opposition to meet, no obstinacy to overcome. Kenny was all demoralised by his danger. He was ready to do anything, go anywhere, be guided in every way.

All that afternoon they spent, the lawyer and Kenny du Gore, in omnibuses, underground railways, two-penny tubes. Kenny must not be traced, and Errington must not be recognised in his company.

It was a degraded, wretched business, this getting Kenny to the docks. For Spain had been decided upon for his sojourning place, and the best way to get there was from Tilbury. They dodged supposititious detectives, and saw danger in every one who looked at them.

But Kenny was grateful. Errington would not let him drink any more, and tried to talk seriously to him about the future. It was not his way to preach, but he could not feel his responsibilities at an end, in merely getting Kenny away.

"If there is no warrant issued within seven days you can reckon yourself safe. You can come back then. The probabilities are great that no action will be taken against you; but you'll be suspect, you'll be, to a certain extent, under police surveillance. What are you going to do when you come back? The Sphinx tells me you are married. Where is your wife? Can't you get your wife to return to you?"

There had come back to Kenny du Gore, as he approached safety, something of manliness and courage. Now, seated opposite to him, over that parting chop, Errington noted that there had returned to him at the same time a certain air of good-breeding, a reminiscence of Eton and the Guards. It began to seem to Errington after all that his work was worth doing; to save the son of General Sir Algernon du Gore from everlasting ignominy and disgrace was not unworthy, even if it were dangerous.

Of what calibre was his wife? Would she do her part, the part the Sphinx had marked out for her?

Everything had been arranged, the passage had been secured, there were two hours before them for talk. For Errington would not leave his new client until he

had seen him on board, until he could take reassurance to Sybil, and the restoration of her peace of mind.

"Is there any chance of reconciliation with your wife?" he asked again. "Tell me about her. You ought to live together when you come back; it would look better."

"She is the daughter of Manny Henry, the outside broker, that chap who advertises, you know. His real name is Solomon."

"How long have you been married?"

"Seven years. I think it is seven years. But we haven't been together much. I ran away with her." His face flushed a little, his career had not been one to which he could look back with pride. "I was up to my neck in difficulties," he said deprecatingly. "I thought Manny would have forked out handsomely," he broke out.

"And didn't he?" asked Errington drily.

"Well, he did, and he didn't," the other admitted reluctantly. "I say, isn't this a beastly chop?"

"Better than skilly."

Kenny looked at him.

"I say, that isn't very gentlemanly."

"Go on, go on about your wife," said Errington impatiently, the day had tired him.

"Lil's quite a good sort." Then he shied again from the topic. "You know that was the time the Governor was due back from Egypt. There had been a fuss about the Sandhurst debts before he left home, and I left half of them out of the list. I did not want to go to the Governor when he came back with a fist full of writs."

"And what happened then?"

"Manny paid. He paid first for one thing, and

then for another for me. He has pots of money, why shouldn't he? I didn't tell the Governor about my marriage; he was called to South Africa directly he was home from Egypt. What was the good of talking? What was done was done. He wouldn't have understood her, she's not a bad sort."

He left off talking, reviewing his past perhaps. Then he burst out:

"You never met such a girl in your life! She was supposed to be clever, you know, matriculated in honours, or some such bosh!"

There was a faint flush again under his skin. It is possible that, when considering his married life, he was not altogether proud of it.

"She did not know anything—anything at all! From words such as everybody uses—slang, she calls them—to a cocktail or a whiskey and soda, she disapproved—disapproved! What do you think of that for Manny Henry's daughter? She set up some West Central standard, I suppose, and thought I was going to live up to it."

Noting Errington's expression, perhaps not wishing to estrange his sympathy, Kenny went on:

"I don't suppose I behaved very well. But you know I was up to my neck in trouble, and my nerves were all to pieces. No fellow could have stood Lil as she was then! She was a prig in petticoats, that's what she was. I used to make the Sphinx die of laughing by telling her about the things Lil had said or done. That is company for a man if you like! The Sphinx! She knows life backwards—understands men. She laughed over what I told her about Manny too. That was what led to the first trouble between Lil and myself. We

were living at Banstead, and I had rushed up to Hans Crescent for dinner, stayed to supper, and got back the next morning. I'd done myself pretty well in town. When she wanted to know where I had been, I let myself loose a bit. I told her how amused the Sphinx had been about her father, I imitated him; he is rather a rare bird, is my father-in-law. That put her back up, and she made a scene; she has got a devil of a temper. I said a few things to her that she didn't like; she really looks rippin' when she gets in a rage. I am not defending myself, but any girl with any sense in her would have known I was only trying to get a rise out of her. But there's no compromise about her, and she—she left me, went back to her father. It suited me very well—it's not so easy to run a secret marriage——”

“And your most pressing debts were all paid?” interpolated the lawyer. “But this is a long time ago—this was while you were still in the regiment. Haven't you seen her since then?”

Kenny's discomfort grew obvious and pronounced.

“Well, you know, when I left the regiment, Manny put the screw on, that was after Lilian went back to him. He wanted me to tell the Governor I was married. And there were lots of people pressing me, who knew some had been paid, and some hadn't, and then the Sphinx was ill, couldn't see me—I hadn't a soul to speak to. I believe I was half off my head with trouble.”

He was coming to that period of his career over which the clouds had gathered most blackly, of which he was most genuinely ashamed. He took it for granted that the lawyer knew what they hid.

His shame was a good sign, a promising sign, Erring-

ton thought. He encouraged him to go on. Kenny burst out:

"You don't know, none of that set ever guessed, the sort of way I had been kept. The Governor was a great soldier, a great man. But I saw nothing of him, I had no pal, never had a real pal." There was a pause. "You know what happened," he went on, his eyes averted. His half-smoked cigar was flung away, he was unable to hold it in his trembling hand. "An accusation was brought against me. Any man is liable to have an accusation brought against him. There wasn't a syllable of truth in it. But, what with Lil and one thing and another—I sent in my papers.

"The Colonel wrote to the Governor; they were old friends. I went to see him, and he told me I had disgraced the regiment, and the name they were all so proud of. He would not hear my side. Then I saw the Governor; the old man cried. He was just back from Egypt, covered with honours. And he cried! I was cut up, I was all to pieces, seeing him like that. I couldn't explain. He told me I ought to go and cut my throat. I could not face him again. What is the good of making a long story of it? I cut the whole thing, and went to Australia. And a ghastly time I had there."

Kenny was making a clean breast of it with a vengeance.

"And afterwards?" Errington asked.

"I got down to bed rock in Australia. I very nearly took the tip and cut my throat. But the Governor was not having a rosy time in South Africa himself. I was in hospital in Adelaide when I heard about it, had a touch of blue devils, very nearly went under. I bor-

rowed a few dollars from the doctor and cabled him. He wrote me such a beautiful letter. Said perhaps he'd been harsh with me, he had not found the world very just. I wanted to get out to him, but it was too late. The old man had died."

Errington found himself looking back. He looked back on himself at twenty-two, and thought that his father also might have kicked him out, shut the door in his face, and died before it had been opened. But he never did. The door had always been open for Errington. Kenny went on:

"You know the way they talked about the Governor, and how they behaved to him, until the truth leaked out, too late for him. The old fellow was so proud, it was not his own muddle for which he paid the penalty. A comrade of his wrote to me to come home, that there was a lot of public feeling in the matter, and he thought I should get the benefit of it. I ought to have got the benefit of it. I applied to the War Office; but not a thing did they do for me, not a thing!"

"But your wife, your father-in-law? Would not they help you?"

"It's easy for you," Kenny broke out, "you married a lady, with a big income, and can live where you like, and do what you like. I had to go and live in that beastly Eton Avenue.

"Then they *did* stand to you."

"Well! I told you Lil wasn't a bad sort. She wrote me regularly all the time I was away. She admitted herself it wasn't all my fault. She has got a very bad temper, no self-control at all. I told you I had a little boy——"

"No! You didn't tell me that."

"He was born just after I went away. He really is a jolly fine little chap, very like my father. Manny bought us a house in Eton Avenue, you know the place, a row of beastly villas, with grimy gardens, pretending to be country houses, with smutty creepers and dingy trees. He made Lil an allowance. I mortgaged The Towers, and it seemed Manny got hold of the mortgage. He wanted the place for the boy. He would do anything for that boy. The place was let, you know, my place, I mean, The Towers, furnished, to pay the interest on the mortgage. Of course that's why she left me the second time, why we are not together now. She has got no idea of business. What does it matter to whom the cheque was drawn? It was my place. And Kennard, you're a man of the world, you know as well as I do that if ever there was a certainty in the world, it was John a' Dreams for the Lincoln Handicap. Mind you, to my dying day, I shall believe the horse was pulled——"

"You endorsed the cheque for the rent in your father-in-law's name?" Errington's mind was quick to take in the position.

"Well, it was my money, wasn't it?" Kenny said. "You must admit I had as much right to it as she had."

"Hardly that. And when your wife found that you had used this money, you had a few words?"

"We had begun about that when the boy came into the room. A good many of our rows have been about Everard. She dresses him in velvet, Kennard, and lace collars! She was ragging me about honesty. I told her a few plain truths about her way of looking at life. And I told her what she was likely to make the

boy by dressing him up like a damn little Jew boy. I was not going to let her have all the say. You can understand that, can't you? But you cannot say things to her as you would to an ordinary girl. She flares out at you in a minute, like a hurricane. And she's got no sense. She thinks it's rather fine to be a Jewess. She tries to teach my boy he ought to be quite as proud he'd got Jew ancestors, as of the du Gores—well—you see——”

Kenny hesitated:

“I did not mean to do him any harm. He is a ripping little chap. She rushed off to make things right with her father, offered to take half her allowance next quarter, or some such rot—he is as rich as Cræsus, and would never have missed that £114. I had the boy to lunch, as she was out. I made him drink a glass or two of wine, I hate a milk sop. When she got home, he was talking away—it was really good sport. You'd have liked to hear him. She flew into one of her tearing rages. She snatched him up in her arms, and cried over him. As if a drop of wine did him any harm, for once. He was as happy as a lark. He let her have it,—he is full of spirits, and said back some of the things he had heard me say, about Jews, you know. I went out when I'd had enough of it. And when I came back she'd gone, and taken the boy with her. That was only a week ago. I thought I'd let her cool down, that was the Sphinx's advice too. Now comes this mess, so I suppose I'll have to apologise. Of course I never meant to let them stop away. You'll see her for me, won't you? Say the right thing. If everything goes right, I'd like them to be in Eton Avenue when I come back.”

Any other man would have been repelled, appalled, disgusted, with Kenny du Gore, with his own story told in his own way, and would have abandoned him to his fate. But Errington Welch-Kennard was not made like ordinary men. To him, always with Algernon Hesel-tine's blighted life in the background of his mind, it never seemed fit that the punishment should follow the crime.

And what could punishment effect in a nature like Kenny's? Bring more obloquy on an honoured name, torture with unavailing bitterness the last days of a dying woman, dower a little son with his father's disgrace? All this passed through Errington's mind.

"Give me your father-in-law's address," he said briefly.

"You'll see Lil, and explain?"

"Yes."

"You can tell her I'm in a mess. She won't understand. But that is the way to get at her."

They were on deck now, the second bell had rung. It was time for Errington to go.

"Are you going to run straight if we get you through this?"

"Do you think I don't know what a brick you've been?"

"But if I persuade your wife back to you?"

"Oh! that's all right."

"You won't forge her father's name, and make your little boy get drunk?"

"What do you take me for?"

"Weak!"

"I'll get all right. I've never had a real chance.
Do your best for me with Lil."

"I will."

"Good-bye, and a thousand thanks!"

"Good-bye, and good luck. I'll wire you."

And Kenny was in safety.

CHAPTER XII

ERRINGTON had promised to see Kenny's wife on his behalf, and he fully intended to keep that promise. But there was a large amount of work in connection with the case which it seemed advisable should first be done, and he went down to the office early on the morning after Kenny's departure to consult with his partner, and generally settle the plan of campaign.

He got through the consultation; but he had hardly taken his seat in his own room, run through the notes awaiting him, and dictated a few letters, when a disturbance outside distracted his attention, and the door was thrust rudely open without the preliminary courtesy of a knock.

"I say, Mister," the intruder began. "Your fellow here said he would see whether you were disengaged. I told him I would find that out for myself. That's my way. I'm a self-made man, I am, and I didn't get there by waiting on clerks. You take your seat again, don't you stand up for me. Send these fellows out of the room. We've got to be alone."

He was a big, fair, coarse-featured man, and he had practically elbowed his way into the office, thrusting aside slow-thinking and astonished clerks and office boys.

Errington's manners were always those of a West End consultant, or lady's doctor, rather than of a Strand lawyer. The interview, whatever its nature, being obvi-

ously inevitable, he decided to submit to it with good grace. He smiled at his visitor.

"You shall tell me in what way I can be of service to you. You can go," he said to the clerks.

"That's right. Now we can talk. I am in trouble, Mister, awful trouble. It's no good beating about the bush. Can you get me a divorce, that is the question? Either you can or you can't. You get me what I want, and I'll give you a cheque for five 'undred guineas. If it's not to be done, tell me straight out. There, that's fair, isn't it?"

"Quite fair," said Errington, still smiling, "quite fair, Mr.—" he waited. But his visitor evidently thought it unnecessary to name himself. "Unfortunately, perhaps, our fees are on a settled scale. However, we need not discuss that part of the business immediately. Tell me, instead, a few details." He took up a pen, poised it over the paper, and waited as if he would take notes.

The new client sat on his spine in a way calculated to accentuate the prominence of his paunch, and the paunch itself was decorated with a white waistcoat. He had a short beard and whiskers of a reddish hue, his nails were bitten down to the quick. His restless hairy hands had each its strange complement of diamond rings. He kept his hat on.

"Settled scale be damned! I beg your pardon, Mister, but I'm no fool, I wasn't born yesterday. I take it, it's just the same with you as it is with me, you want as much as you can get. Now about this divorce."

Errington was amused. The man's unconventionality, and the suspicious redness round the rims of his

eyes, appealed to him. This client was obviously distressed.

"What has your wife done?" Errington asked simply, putting down the pen, looking him straight in the face.

"*My wife!* Oh, Lord bless you, you are on the wrong track. She's been dead this ten years, a good soul. She's got two ton of the best Peterhead marble on her, and there's not a soul goes up to Willesden but stops to read the inscription. My Lil wrote the inscription. It's not my wife that's troubling me. She never did, I will say that for her. No, it's my Lil. It's her I want the divorce for."

"For your daughter?"

Her name was Lil, too; it was a curious coincidence! Errington began to get interested.

"Yes, my daughter. I've only got one, and, poor gal, she's married to a damned scamp of a swell. He has broke her heart, I tell you." His voice rose as if the lawyer had contradicted him. "He's broke her heart, that's what he's done."

His large hairy hands with their bitten nails, were trembling, and his eyes were suffused.

"They have got a boy. You never see such a boy. Straight as a dart he holds himself. Calls me 'Gran,' he does; I never had a boy of my own."

"Where is your daughter now?"

"She's with me. She and the boy came a week ago. Now he wants them back. But there's got to be an end of it. My sister-in-law went up to see Lil this morning, leastways she's not my sister-in-law, but a Viennese adventuress my fool of a brother-in-law married, and told her that if he wants the boy, the law'll

give it to him. 'And a damned law it is, if it's true! But we will see about that. I'm goin' to keep that boy if it costs me a 'undred thousand pounds."

"We must see what we can do. Go on with your story," said Errington, soothingly. A flash of intuition told him who was his visitor, the coincidence was indeed remarkable. "I don't know that the law takes a child away from its mother unless there is some very definite cause."

"Definite cause? She's got every cause to leave him. He's got no cause to find fault with her. She's got a heart of gold, that girl has. Well, Mister, I'll get on. You want to know all about it. He's a bad egg, that's what he is, always has been. A young fellow I know, a fellow who plays Bridge at my club, told me Kenneth du Gore was a bad egg when he was at Eton."

Of course, this was Manny Henry. And Elsa Beethoven had put his back up, precipitated matters, by repeating some idle boast of Kenny's that he could make his wife come back to him if he chose, by merely claiming the boy. Errington damned the woman, but then that had been his habit for years when Elsa Beethoven intruded herself on his notice.

"He would have been sent away, only his father was General du Gore, and had been in the same house. They hushed it up while he was at Eton. It was by the skin of his teeth that he got into the Army."

"Yes, yes! I know all about him. I know your son-in-law." Manny rose heavily.

"Then you know a damned blackguard, that's all I can say. And I suppose you're on his side. I suppose I've come to the wrong shop. I suppose I've got to go elsewhere."

"Now, you sit down again, Mr. Henry. For I suppose it is Mr. Henry to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"Yes, that's me. And aren't you on Kenny's side?"

"I'm on no side as yet. I want to hear all about it. What is the immediate cause for divorce?"

Had the story of the raid spread? Was Kenny indeed implicated beyond hope?

"What has he done?" he asked, his brain working rapidly. "Tell me about it."

Yet, whatever Kenny du Gore had done, or was, Errington must help, if help were possible. The Sphinx had imperilled him. For the sake of the old days, the old days that would never die, he must do what he could for Kenneth du Gore.

Mr. Henry began to pour forth a stream of talk, while Errington was trying to discover what he actually knew. But, as the talk went on, it began to grow clear that it was of Kenny's past reputation, it was nothing new, he was hearing. Much was public property. It was true that Kenny had been a bad egg. His father had paid his debts more than once. He had left the Army abruptly, and for an unexplained reason; all this was an old story.

Errington interrupted a phrase of Mr. Henry's.

"But his father paid his debts, before he left for Egypt. They could not have accumulated to any great extent." He thought he might as well hear the worst. "And then, there is The Towers, that belongs to Kenny surely, and is entailed on his son." Errington's brain acted quickly.

"His father paid his debts, did he? That's a good un. Yow! His father paid his debts! Yow!"

The word was new to Errington. It expressed contempt, incredulity, derision. It was curiously picturesque and expressive. It was not a bark, it was a distinct word, which would have been to an etymologist as is a hidden nugget to the seeker after gold.

"Yow! *He* paid them? *I* paid them! with my hard-earned money! I paid my lord's bootmakers, tailors, motor-car people. That's what I've worked for nigh on forty years—to pay some one else's blasted debts!"

Manny Henry had neither reticence, nor self-restraint. He said he was a self-made man, and it was evident he was proud of his creation. He was as graphic in his description of his wife's tombstone as he was in giving an outline of a dispute he had had with the manager of the Stock Exchange tape-machine. He forgot, in his autobiographical diffusiveness how urgent was his business. Everybody knew all about him, he said. Errington thought it would have been marvellous had any one escaped knowing.

Unhappy and distressed as he obviously was, it was, nevertheless, with ever-increasing difficulty that he was kept to the subject in hand. It was only by the exercise of infinite patience that Errington succeeded in extracting from him the history of Kenneth du Gore, as he knew it, and what was the immediate cause of offence that had brought Kenny's incongruous father-in-law to Southampton Street.

"I was a damned fool! of course, I was a damned fool! I met him at the club, about eight years ago now, it is; and I took him home. She was hardly seventeen, my Lil wasn't, and the poor girl hadn't got a mother. That makes a difference, you know. Well,

I'll make the story short. She took a fancy to him. He was a 'andsome fellow, I must say that for him, and he looked like a gentleman. His father was on his way back from Egypt, and you know what a hullabaloo they were making about him in the papers just then. How was I to know his only son was such a blackguard? I don't mind telling you I was rather proud of him, for I'm a self-made man, I am, and he was a cut above me, at least, I thought he was. He says now that Lil made love to him, and that I did. His affairs were involved; he had got into debt a bit, as young fellows will. He said he did not care to face his father, so I paid them for him. I said to him, 'There you are, my boy, now you can tell the Governor everything, and that you are in love with my girl, and a handsomer nor a better one you won't find in London. I will go to him if you like,' I said, 'I'm not afraid to face any man.'

"And when you see my Lil, Mister, you will say any man ought to have been proud of her for a daughter-in-law. As for me, there's a lot of talk about outside brokers, but, you take my word for it, inside or outside, it's all one, we're on the make, and that's the long and the short of it.

"Well, what do you think they did? Didn't wait for me to see the General, didn't wait for him to come home, they made a bolt for it. My brother-in-law, Sam Beethoven, he says, that seeing me live in style as I did, and knowing as her mother was dead, the young blackguard thought she had got money of her own. But, between ourselves, Mister, I took my wife out of a fried fish shop, and she didn't have a bob. I don't believe in marrying for money, you've never got as much as a woman with money of her own wants to spend. You

take it from me, it's cheaper marrying a woman without money than with. Well, that's neither here nor there. Within a year my Lil was back with me."

He could not go on. His indignation shook his voice. Errington gave him a moment to recover himself, and then asked:

"Why did she come back to you?" He wanted to hear Manny's view. If, instead of a divorce, he must persuade this young woman to return to her husband, it was essential he should know his ground.

"Well," Manny had become less fluent. "I never could quite hear the rights of it. There was a woman; you know her, you were mixed up in that Heseltine case?"

Now Errington's attention was fully arrested.

"Yes," he said briefly.

"He left a wife, Heseltine did! a bad un too!"

"No!" Errington could not let that pass. The word shot out involuntarily.

But Manny did not seem to have noticed it.

"This young fellow got in with her somehow or other. I don't say there was anything wrong between them. From what I heard, it seems she was a bit of an invalid, and not young neither. But, right or wrong, Lil and 'im were living at Banstead. And nothing would serve him but coming up to see that woman when the fit took him. And Lil 'ated all she knew of her. No wonder, seeing they had been married 'ardly six months, and she was in the way, you know."

"Did the Sphinx—did Mrs. Heseltine know Kenneth to be a married man? Had the marriage been made public?" Errington asked slowly. He was trying to piece things together, talking against time.

"I can't quite tell you the rights of that. It's my belief none of his people knew. He was still in the Army, though what he was doing there, except being 'on leave,' is more than I can tell you. Anyway, it all seemed to come to a smash together. He went and spent a night with Mrs. Heseltine."

"Evening," interrupted Errington.

"Well, he didn't get back till the next morning. And it seems they had a regular set to, 'im and Lil, and she takes the train and up she comes to me; I was pleased enough, I can tell you, to have her. I said, 'We will let 'im cool his 'eels a bit, and then I'll see what he's got to say about it.'"

"Well," said Errington, encouragingly, "well, what happened?"

"Well, the damned young scamp! I waited a week, and then Lil seemed to begin to fret. She was going to have a baby, poor gal, and she thought she had been hasty. So off I goes, and I tries to find him. The damned young scamp! Would you believe it, but that was the last we see of him for five years?"

Yes, it was over five years since that memorial supper. Errington thought of what those years had brought him, wealth, reputation, happiness! Of the last he was not quite sure. Could he be happy or content while the Sphinx lived, and made her claim insistent?

"Did not her husband write to her?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, he wrote fast enough. It seemed he had got into trouble with his regiment, and the Colonel insisted on his getting out of the way quick. Kenny hadn't the pluck to tell his father about Lil, or the boy that was coming to her, or that he was married at all. What do you think of that? The young cur! I wanted

to go to the General when he came home from Egypt, and tell him myself, but Lil would not hear of it. She wouldn't go against her husband's interest, she said. She declared she had been as much to blame as he, she ought not to have left him. Anyway, he had not been gone six months before she was wild to go out to him. The boy had been born then. Kenny hadn't a home for her to go to, and, though they patched it up, so to speak, in their letters, he was not so anxious for her to go out, it appears. And then, somehow or other, she got to feel she could not leave the boy, and she could not take 'im with her, and, to cut a long story short, the both of them settled down with me."

"And that lasted five years," said Errington, "your daughter and grandson living with you, Kenneth remaining abroad and keeping up an affectionate, for I presume it was affectionate, correspondence?"

"Yes, you've sized it up right. I thought it was going on for always—in fact I thought I'd got shut of him. Then, all of a sudden, she comes into my room, wild with excitement. 'Father,' she says, 'father, Kenny is coming back; he wants to see his boy. We are going to be so happy together! Say you're glad!'

"You know"—Manny Henry's voice softened, softened as had seemed impossible—"she wanted sympathy. She 'asn't got no mother. What could I do? I said I was glad if I thought she was going to be happy with him. I said I would do what I could for them. And, Mister, I did what I could. I did as much as any father could do, and more too. It was a wrench to part with the boy. I told you 'e called me Gran, didn't I? I took a house for them in Eton Avenue, St. John's Wood, took it ready against he came 'ome. It stands high, you

know, and I thought the air was good for him, for the boy, I mean. He's not one of the strongest. He don't take after me, nor her. I don't expect they ever had much constitution, those du Gores—they're a rotten lot, your British aristocracy! But that's neither here nor there. There is not a 'andsomer looking child in Russell Square than my grandson. People turned round to look at him. We didn't spare nothing on his clothes, Lil nor I, and proud I was when we took him into Peter Robinson's or Swears and Wells'; velvet suits, lace collars, I couldn't grudge him nothing. He's got curls on him, fair curls, well, I tell you it was a wrench to part with him. He used to come into my room while I was dressing, and talk! why, 'e might 'ave been a man!

"Well, I furnished a house for them, and I said, 'Lil, there will be £250 every quarter paid into your account at the London Joint Stock Bank. And if the boy wants for anything beyond that, and times is fairly good with me, you come along, that's all, just come along, and ask.'

"Did I tell you what that boy said to me when I asked him what he would like for 'is nursery? He says, 'Why a rocking-horse of course; fancy you not knowing that.' 'Fancy me not knowing that!' he says. And then 'e jumped on my knee and whispered in my ear; 'I want one with real hair on it, Gran, same as Josh Beethoven has got.' I says, 'If Sam Beethoven has bought his boy a horse, you shall have one too, and twice as large as his! And if his has got hair on it, damned if yours sha'n't have a chignon.'

"Did you ever buy a rockin'-horse, Mister Lawyer? I didn't know what I was letting myself in for! Anyway, I got him one made of skin, with a mane and tail

as if it was a Shetland pony. Cost me £25! But you should have seen his face! I went up to Eton Avenue when it was due home, and we took the paper off it, Lil and I, while he was out with his nurse. When he came in, we stood before it, and I said, 'What do you think is behind me?' Well, he just sprang at me, 'It's a rocking-horse! It's a rocking-horse! I know it's a rocking-horse,' he said. But, when he saw it, why the tears came into his eyes, he was that pleased, and the colour flushed all over his dear little face. I tell you, Mister, if you've never had a grandson, you don't know what it is. And he would not get on the horse until he had jumped up into my arms, and kissed me and thanked me for it. He's got a heart in him, he's made of the right stuff, he is! Lil and I sat there afterwards, and watched him riding—shoulders back, head up, curls in the air—I tell you it was a sight!

"Well, to come back to the story. Everything was ready for Kenny when he came back."

Manny paused, he got up and walked about the room. He could not control his voice. There was actually a sob in it.

"Not a month's happiness she didn't have, that poor gal, not a month's! God Almighty knows what he did to her. He drinks like a fish to begin with. Anyway, s'elp me God, the whole year he's been at home I've never been up unexpectedly to that 'ouse without seeing Lil with her eyes half swollen out of her head with crying, and him either out, or in bed too drunk to see me. That's my son-in-law!

"I don't know what there was between them a week ago. But, at seven o'clock, when I came home from the City, and was just takin' a snooze before dinner, I

heard a voice in the hall. 'Where's Dad, Mary?' I 'eard her say to the parlourmaid. I opened the door. There she was, holding the boy by the hand, her eyes just blazing, no tears about them this time. 'Dad,' she says, 'I have come home, if you will have me. I am never going back to Kenny! I've done with him. Will you have us?' 'Will I, will I just?' says I. I may be common, he has told me so often enough, and not good enough for him, but she didn't find any fault with her old Dad."

Manny Henry paused again.

"She stayed with me that evening. He sat up to dinner, the boy did, you should have seen him, like a little man! Said he was not sleepy, that he never was sleepy! Fancy that now! he says he never is sleepy! Anyway, he sat up, and eat his dinner with us, and when he had gone to bed, I said to Lil, 'Now, let's have a talk, old girl.' She said, 'Not to-night, father, I'm awfully done. You just let me sit here, like I used to'—that's by me, you know. My gal and I always got on well. She sat on a stool by me, with her 'ead on my knee. Of course, she'd got the 'ump. I won't say I didn't 'ave it too. She never told me what the row had been, I didn't press it. I know he's a bad lot. I just said, 'My 'ome's your 'ome, gal,' and that's all about it. Well, I thought we'd settled down, got shut of him. But, this morning, up comes Elsa Beethoven, Sam's wife, with some yarn about Kenny's rights, and Kenny's reputation. And she worked on Lil; I told Lil she wasn't to do naught until she'd heard from me. I asked about a good sharp lawyer, and more than one named you, so I came straight along. Now, what can you do for us? that's the question. I told you before, I don't

care what it costs, my gal must be free. Get 'im out of the country, get 'im where he can't bother us, nor interfere with the boy."

Last night's events had not yet transpired. Errington was thinking deeply all the time Manny Henry was talking. He was glad Manny knew nothing of last night, nothing of the real object of Elsa Beethoven's interference. The woman had brains, he paid her that unwilling tribute. It was best Kenneth's wife should return to him on normal grounds, the rest could follow.

No life was hopeless which had no prison stain on it, when only suspicion, and not conviction, had stained. And the Sphinx wished it, wished it desperately. He must do what he could for Kenny. His mind was made up. He looked up, frankly meeting Manny Henry's red-rimmed eyes:

"I should like to talk matters over with your daughter. I must tell you, Mr. Henry, that I have seen Kenny, that he has already consulted me, and asked me to see his wife on his behalf. You are misinformed about his intention to claim the boy. He wants a reconciliation."

"She'll never hear of that, never! I know my Lil. When she says a thing she sticks to it. She's done with him."

"But you are going to let me see her, speak to her," Errington said persuasively.

"Why not? You can come along home with me now, for that matter. For, the sooner we know where we stand, the better. I hate shilly-shally. When you've seen her, and talked to her, you'll know you can't move her. Then you'll come over to us, eh? It is better worth your while, I can tell you that, than acting for

him. He's no good to anybody, isn't Kenny, an ungrateful fellow."

"Still, it doesn't seem to me that you have grounds for a divorce at the moment?" he interrogated, quickly suspicious. But Manny was keeping back nothing.

"Well, you come home with me and see the gal yourself. Maybe she'll tell you what she hasn't even told me. She's not one to blab, isn't my Lil. Cruel he's been, and he's never maintained her. I'm not up in the law, but I want to get shut of him, and I know it's to be done. Will you come home with me now and talk to her?"

"My dear Sir! I have half a dozen appointments—I'm full of engagements. I sha'n't be free for hours." But he was, at least, as anxious as Manny. "I sha'n't get clear of my work until six o'clock at the earliest."

"That suits me down to the ground. Don't you make any ceremony, come and have a bit of dinner with us. That will give you a chance of seeing Lil, and I will keep the boy up, I'd like you to see the boy. Have a bit of dinner with us."

"I can hardly do that, Mr. Henry, really. Why I'm actually engaged on the other side," he said smiling.

"That's neither here nor there. I tell you I've got the best cook in London. If you don't like what she does for us to-night, don't you come again, that's all! And there isn't a better in London."

Errington hesitated. A streak of Bohemianism, of sympathy with the bizarre, had always been characteristic of him, and it prompted him to accept the unconventional invitation. He was pledged to an uncongenial task, and he might as well go through with it.

Manny pressed his invitation.

"And I've got some Lafitte"—he pronounced it as if it had been a pedal appendage—"that will warm the cockles of your heart! You will be on our side if you see the boy, and taste that Lafitte. Come now, say yes!"

It suited Errington to dine out, to avoid those difficult *tête-à-têtes* with his wife. It was absurd to dine with Manny Henry, the man himself was an absurdity, an anachronism.

But certainly it would give him an opportunity, and an immediate opportunity, of approaching Kenneth's wife. The prospect of the child dining with them did not deter him, as might have been the case with some other men. He had a soft spot in his heart for children.

Kenny du Gore's son! That a boy should have been born to such a one as Kenny, while he was childless! He decided abruptly.

"All right. Then, I will come to dinner, and see your daughter, and the boy. What time did you say?"

"I didn't say no time. As a matter of fact, I told them I should like dinner at 7.30, so's he should not be too tired. Do you mind? Because, if you do, we'll put it off half an hour, and I'll tell them to make him lie down a bit before dinner."

"Oh, not at all! Don't alter your arrangements for me. I can be with you at 7.30."

Manny said again that he was a good fellow, and he didn't think he would be sorry for it. He would have the chill taken off the Lafitte, and he would telephone home that cook was to spread herself out.

They shook hands, parting with extreme cordiality.

Left alone, Errington spared himself five minutes for a day-dream, in which the old life and the new life mingled curiously. If the old life had been bad, at least,

it had had its compensations. If the new life were good, it certainly had its drawbacks.

Kenny du Gore and Elsa Beethoven—how strange she should be Manny's sister-in-law. The juxtaposition of the two figures disturbed him, he could not say why. He had a sense of discomfort, as he envisaged them, an indefinite, uneasy sensation.

But Kenny's wife, the "Lil," to whom he would be introduced that evening, had no place in his thoughts.

CHAPTER XIII

HE wrote the Sphinx a reassuring line, telling her of Kenny's departure, also of Manny Henry's visit, and that he was dining with him to-night. Then he rang up Berenice on the telephone. He found it easier to be amiable at the telephone than at close quarters.

"Are you there? That's you, isn't it, dear?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I dine out to-night? I can save myself several hours' work to-morrow if I give up this evening to business. Tell me if it puts you out in any way."

"Of course not."

"Send my things down, then, will you? James can bring them. It must be early, for we are dining at 7.30."

"Oh, easily. I'll send him at once, or," as an afterthought, "or bring them myself."

"No, no, don't bother. And, I say, what will you do? Will you be dull? Won't you go to a play? You can easily find some one to go with you. Shall I send out, and get the tickets?"

"I've letters to write, a new novel, some needlework to finish. You know I'm never dull!"

"I shall be home quite early, I expect. But don't sit up." And he added a few affectionate words.

It was ten minutes later when Berenice received the letter from Harry, of which she had spoken to her hus-

band the following day at breakfast. He had written asking her if she would meet him somewhere, or if she would come to the rooms he had taken. It was a very humble letter. He said that, for her sake, he would do everything in his power to make things right again between her husband and himself; for he was miserable without them, they were all he had belonging to him. This had touched Berenice. She had replied impulsively by driving straight round to the Albany, by rushing up to his rooms, unannounced and unexpected.

Harry had not anticipated this, and, unhappily, he was not alone. He was already agitated, and rather husky with emotion, when he opened the door to her.

"How good, how good of you to come, dear. But I'm not quite alone, you won't mind, will you?"

Berenice had a quick impression of a tall foreign woman with pink-lidded eyes, and a good figure, in the background.

"Oh! but of course Mrs. Welch-Kennard vill not mind. She vill know, ve are such old, such dear, friends. Present me, dear Harry, present me to your sister."

Berenice was conscious of Harry's embarrassment, and a general sense of artificiality and cheap drama.

"Berenice, you will remember, this is the wife of my colleague, of whom I have spoken to you." Harry was very ill at ease.

"Mr. Annesley, he calls my 'usband his colleague, but he vos really his subordinate, his servant," Elsa said deprecatingly. She had had that short interview with Errington this very morning. It influenced her, beyond a doubt.

"No, no, not my servant, he was not my servant."

"Your brozzer is so kind, so good to everybody, he will not own my husband vos his servant!"

Berenice realised that the faded woman with the pink lids was making eyes at Harry, playing for his benefit. A sudden indefinable sensation of dislike, disgust, seized upon her, it was difficult to command her courteous speech. Fortunately, the scene ended almost as soon as it began. It appeared that Elsa Beethoven must go, must go immediately, she had an appointment, she said she "vos so full of engagements." She managed, with outstretched hand and cordiality, with something of gush, to launch her little shaft:

"I am so glad to meet wiv you, Mrs. Kennard; I have heard so much of you. Your husband and I, too, are such old friends. It is not only from your brother zat I have heard your praises. Errington, he vos at my house zis morning."

It was rather a shock to think of Errington in the house of this repellant woman.

"I told him he should have brought you to see me before zis. But you must come wiv Harry. I am always at home on ze Vednesdays. You will bring her to see me, von't you, Harry?"

"I know so few of my husband's clients, I have so little time for visiting," said Berenice, somewhat stiffly.

Elsa laughed, and it was a grating laugh.

"Oh! it is not zat I am a client of your husband's! I have no business, no law business, I am simply his 'old friend.' He is looking so vell, ve never zought he vould like so much to be married. It must be that you are so clever!" and she laughed again. "I suppose you are not jealous viz him, that is the secret. You do not inquire vere he go! He is so charming, it is no

vonder ze women run after him. You are so wise in not minding. But I must go; it is not good zat I stay so long here." She simpered at Harry, and again Berenice had that throe of disgust and distaste. "You vill come and see me, ve shall become goot friends, like me and your husband. Not zis veek, I have a visitor zis veek. He told you about my visitor, eh! But, of course, I must not tell you his secrets. Good-bye! good-bye, dear Mrs. Kennard. You too are charming."

Harry, with shame-faced apology to his sister, went out with Elsa Beethoven, going downstairs to see her into a cab. Berenice found the atmosphere lighter and better when she had gone.

"What a hateful woman!" she said to herself. "What a hateful, hateful woman!"

But, of course, inevitably, she had added,

"What was Errington doing there this morning, if she is not a client? and why does she call him 'Errington'?"

She was momentarily uncomfortable, she had a sense of irritation, vexation; thus far Elsa had succeeded. But the jealousy did not last beyond the next morning, when she had voiced it to her husband. She would not encourage it. Besides, it was true that women ran after him. She saw it whenever they went out together, and she was proud of it. That she was his wife, his loving loyal wife, was her wonderful privilege and good fortune.

Moved as she was for a moment by Elsa's malice, Harry, nevertheless, found her almost restored by the time he returned. Elsa had poured venom, too, into his ears. She had spoken of the lawyer's connection with Algernon Heseltine's wife, as if the nature of it were known to everybody. She had made it definite and cer-

tain to Harry that the intimacy, which had not stopped with his marriage, had been one that explained the sacrifice Kennard had made in preparing Heseltine's defence, in suborning justice in the endeavor to secure his freedom.

Harry was so affectionately eager to show Berenice his sympathy, that he rather overdid his part. She asked him, smiling, presently, for what it was that he pitied her. They came to close quarters then. He had to hesitate in his speech; for, as it had been with Fred Darcy, so it was now with Harry Annesley. He came up against the dead wall of her loyalty. Only this time she was quite calm and secure. She listened to all he had to say, and then replied:

"Harry, dear, don't heed anything you hear. I wish you would listen only to me. Surely you can see for yourself how happy I am, how intensely happy. I have the best and kindest, the dearest, husband in the world. It is a grief to me that you and he do not yet understand each other, it is the only trouble I have had since I married him. But I know it is only a question of time, you are both so good to me."

"But what about this woman, dear? He is there nearly every day."

"With Sybil Heseltine?"

"Yes. He ought not to visit her, to go there so frequently. You don't know, you don't understand, you couldn't understand, how men regard everything connected with that man. He was outside the pale of humanity. Everything and everybody that touched him was infected. You must not let Errington go to her; you must use your influence."

"I wouldn't raise a finger to prevent him doing any-

thing he wishes. Independence of action, of thought too, is the very essence of happiness. It is the lack of it, the attempt to curtail it, that has ruined so many married lives. I have heard Norman say it, and I know how true it is. I wouldn't wrong Errington by doubting him, or questioning his movements. And I think he is so right not to let his old friend miss him, and be lonely in her old age and misery and sickness. I love him more for it. I gladly spare him to her. Why should I claim all his hours or thoughts? What am I to deserve them? Harry, dear, I wish I could make you see eye to eye with me in this. I don't want to be a drag and a tie to him. I am grateful if I may be a home and a rest for him. He must live as a man, with an individuality, not as a mere husband. I don't think you realise him at all, his fine intellect, his great heart! Oh! he must have his freedom."

"Whatever he does with it?"

The words were bitter and involuntary; but Harry did not mean bitterly. He was full of unhappy retrospection, and uneasy lest she too might suffer.

He had met Elsa Beethoven by accident that morning. It was ten years since they had parted, and the ten years had eaten into the skin and eyes of the woman, lined and faded her. Also they had been stained years, and that, too, she bore subtly about her.

Her recognition of Harry had preceded his of her; and, in the excitement and strangeness of that recognition, she had made it appear to him that her agitation was because the past had never died to her, that he was still what he had been to her during those days in Bucharest. And she had met him when he was lonely and very unhappy. Before going out he had sent that

letter to Berenice, and he was doubting, fearing, hoping for her reply.

So his response to Elsa had fed her vanity. They had lunched together; afterwards she had gone up to his rooms for that "chat about old times," which seemed so necessary, so attractive in the first flush of their meeting.

He was such a lonely man, lacking friends, and almost acquaintances; but his sojourn with Berenice had taught him much, and his ideas had altered. It was not only Elsa Beethoven's faded looks that had jarred on him.

She had told Harry, unsolicited, that she loved him still. Her appeal to him was almost the *ad misericordiam* appeal. She had been "so true to the memory of their love," she was "unhappy, misunderstood"; her children, for whom she had "sacrificed so much, failed her in sympathy."

She was stung by the snub Errington had given her scarcely an hour ago, by his contemptuous disregard, she was keen to prove her power afresh. Harry's newly born consciousness of what is best in woman, delicacy, refinement, reserve, had an unconscious shock.

But all she had told him of Errington Welch-Kennard, he was inclined to believe. He did not want to believe it, he bore his brother-in-law little malice for that after-dinner episode. He had not the same sensitiveness as men more gently nurtured. But it was not an affectation, it was quite genuine with him, to look upon Algernon Heseltine and his crime as unspeakable. He had no wide sympathy, no breadth of vision. It was an ugly and hateful subject, and he would have been glad to banish it, but he had no doubt as to the correctness of his own mental attitude in the matter. He did

not want to think about it, he had missed Berenice's sweet companionship so much these last two days, he longed for it on any terms.

Already he was vaguely conscious that Elsa Beethoven was no substitute for Berenice, already he was vaguely uncomfortable through her reappearance in his life. Now it was only his pity she touched.

Harry soon gave up the attempt to discuss Errington's conduct in the Heseltine case, with Berenice. He saw how impossible it was to move her. The latter part of the evening which the brother and sister spent together was passed in planning an Italian winter for Harry. He had a short, hacking cough that made Berenice anxious. His prominent eyes were too bright, his cheeks too red. The change of climate from Galatz to London had not suited him, and in every way it would be well he should try a change of scene. He agreed with that; he realised already that Elsa was a danger to the good resolutions he had made before he came home. Berenice could use the time he was away on his behalf, persuading Errington that he had not meant to insult him or his guests, that he had not known there was a division of feeling on the subject of Algernon Heseltine; he could not realise this now. If he would go to Italy there would be something of which he and Errington could talk when he came home. She had set her heart on bringing them together, but she did not underrate the difficulties.

Theirs was a quiet and domestic evening. They dined together at Verrey's, so that neither of them need dress, they returned to the Albany for more talk. He saw her home at ten o'clock, and kissed her "good-bye" on the doorstep, both of them hoping Errington might return, and make a reconciliation possible.

But it was not until the next morning at breakfast that she had had her opportunity with her husband, and then as has been seen, it was not conspicuously successful.

Meanwhile, Errington himself had had a new experience.

He had dressed at his office, the brougham was at the door in good time, Berenice had been thoughtful in her orders.

"Russell Square," he said to the footman, "and tell Ryder to drive as quickly as he can, I am late."

What a dull Bloomsbury! What a depressing heavy atmosphere lay over the grey houses, and the grey green squares. What a brooding stillness there was in the air!

The house, at which the carriage stopped, was a fine old Georgian one, with wide front door and hall. Errington, even as he entered, realised the possibilities of unambitious plutocracy.

It was a parlour-maid who opened the door, a staid and respectable person of mature age, neither modern nor smart. But he had hardly time to notice her, or his surroundings, for Manny Henry met him in the hall, with outstretched hands and an effusive hospitality, oriental and generous.

"I thought I 'eard you ring. You come in here; we won't go up to the drawing-room, we ain't going to make company of you. Lil is not down yet, but she won't be long. And the boy is going to sit up. She thinks it is a bad habit for 'im to get into, but I said she must make an exception to-night. That was right, wasn't it? You will like to see 'im, won't you?"

Errington said all that the occasion required.

He was interested in what Manny Henry called his "libery." There was not a book in it of any kind, sort, or description. The walls were hung with a startling scarlet-and-white. The easy-chair and sofa were upholstered in a leather also of startling scarlet. There was an elaborate table arranged with liqueur glasses and tumblers, and all appliances for drink. There was a card-table outspread. Manny, as if noticing Errington's glance at it, said:

"I've just been 'aving a rubber. Three fellows I know came up to talk business with me, and we sat down to Bridge, just to pass the time. The room smells smoky, don't it? I ought to have asked you whether you minded smoking."

"Not at all. I'm not a great smoker myself, but I always find the odour of a good Havana healthy and agreeable."

"Well, you won't find bad ones 'ere. I stick to a brand, Upman's, and as a matter of fact, I don't think you will find anything to beat it. You shall try one after dinner."

The intensity of Manny's hospitality was a little embarrassing, but Errington, who was nothing if not adaptable, met his mood.

Internally, perhaps, he was already yawning, was already wondering why the devil he had come, was already composing the excuse that should take him away immediately the dinner was over.

But, when Mary opened the door, and announced that dinner was ready, and, at the same moment, Lilian appeared on the stairs, holding the little boy by the hand, Errington's internal yawn was arrested.

He did not know what he had expected of Manny

Henry's daughter, of Kenny du Gore's wife. All he knew was that he had not expected this girlish figure, with the small head so regally held, the dark tragic eyes, and the soft young lips.

He had come as Kenny's advocate; he knew that was why he had come. But if this were his wife, then, when he should plead with her for her husband, the task would not prove tedious.

"This is my grandson, Mr. Kennard. 'Old out your hand, old boy, and say 'ow-do-you-do' to the gentleman."

Kenny's son was all, and more than, his proud grandfather had described. His head, overrun with red gold curls, was held as regally as his mother's. His blue eyes were set wide apart, under level brows, his milk-white teeth glistened prettily behind his mouth's perfect bow. And he was as voluble as Manny Henry; he soon monopolised the conversation.

Errington, who had the rare gift of being able to talk to children, heard that Everard could read, but liked being read to best; that "Mummy" read him about "Gulliver Cromwell," and about "Macfello" from Lamb's Tales.

Lilian tried to set him right, but Manny thought it was unkind to check him, and saw nothing wrong in the misconceptions. Errington begged that he would describe these two stories, and, if his mother blushed for the muddled way in which his little mind had adopted her teaching, she could not but be proud to see how well he was entertaining their guest.

"I like playin' soldiers best of anything. My other Grandpa was a great General, he foughted with a lot of Bores, and that killed him, but not before Lord

Roberts knowed it wasn't his fault. I'm goin' to be a General when I grow up. I'm Captain now when I play with Vilet in the Park!"

"And do you drill her?"

"Oh! yes! I know all the words of command. I just say:" (he shouted it) "'Standard Ease,' and she does it. But Mummy, I'm not sure what Daddy told me. Vilet says it ought to be 'Stand out ease,' her father is a great man too, he's a sergeant, and that's what he told her. But father can't be wrong, can he?"

"No, of course not, certainly not," she said hastily. It was obvious, she even wanted to make it quickly obvious, that Everard was still to respect his father, was to be kept in ignorance as to their relations. The lawyer grasped her intention, and responded to it with a glance of quickening interest.

Perhaps his mood was responsible for his interest; but there was never a mood of Errington Welch-Kennard in which the sex had failed to interest him.

In the vague picture that had formed itself in his mind, the daughter of Manny Henry had figured, aquiline, angular, semitic, with the typical *gaucherie* of the High School girl.

Lilian du Gore, seated opposite to him at the dinner-table, that dinner-table without flowers, loaded with dull silver, Georgian, but badly cleaned, was as beautiful as Esther must have been, or as the Rachel for whom Jacob worked his fourteen weary years. And vaguely, whimsically, it was Ahasuerus or Jacob that Errington wished he might play to-night. Manny Henry's ancestors must have been Spanish or Portuguese Jews. Errington, listening to the little boy, answering him, playing his part well, was nevertheless all the time occupied

in trying to find the exact adjective to describe her colouring. It was like pale meerschaum, he finally decided, ivory, golden-smoked, tinted. It deepened round the eyes into dark shades that accentuated those eyes' depths. Only the lips made a dash of scarlet amid the browns and blacks of that murky hair and skin. Crumpled, and scarlet, and soft, the lips broke over the dazzling teeth.

She was very slender, almost unformed. She looked too young to be the mother of a boy of six, she seemed eighteen rather than six-and-twenty.

Errington thought he would prevent her from making havoc of her life. Whatever Kenny du Gore had done, he would reconcile them to each other. There was strength in that young face opposite him. He would teach her that she must lend that strength to her husband. Of course Kenny was weak. His viciousness, if indeed he were vicious, was due to this. His wife and son must be saved for him. Already Errington saw himself as their guardian angel.

It was wonderful how philanthropic Errington Welch-Kennard felt, as he sat opposite his beautiful new client, her little boy chattering by his side, and thought of all he should do for her.

Before the dessert stage of the dinner had been reached (and a very excellent dinner it was, by the way), the child had dropped out of the conversation, and Manny had talked his fill of stocks and shares. Errington, always at ease in a difficult position, had replied with travel, bric-a-brac, domestic sociology.

He wanted to see Lilian's face light up with animation, but, indeed, he met with only a limited response. Her thoughts, whatever their nature, absorbed

her, and, when the dessert was served, she took her son to bed.

Errington, as he opened the door for her, said:

"I am to have the pleasure of an interview with you, later on, I believe."

She simply replied, "Yes," as she passed out, but she had raised her wonderful eyes to his, and they held him.

She had hardly spoken during dinner, and the "Yes" was all she vouchsafed him now.

"What do you think of 'er? What do you think of my Lil?" Manny asked Errington, almost before the door had closed, almost before his guest had resumed his seat.

Manny gave him no time for replying, it went without saying, his expression said it.

"And, mind you, it isn't only 'er looks, she's as good as she is beautiful. She is a beauty, isn't she? and clever too! Now, what does she want with that young black-guard tacked on to 'er? There's my nephew, my own sister's son, one of the sharpest! You look out for him —'e'll be a millionaire one day, and that not before long neither! He says to me only last week, 'If Lil was in the market, Uncle, I'm a buyer!' Why shouldn't she be in the market? That's what I want to know. It's not as if she was 'appy, or as if he cared for her. She's never 'ad a 'appy hour, no, nor a 'appy moment since he came back from Australia. He drinks like a fish; he gambles. I say naught against gambling. If some of them didn't do it, Lord knows where I should be! But there's sense and reason, even in gambling. He's taken what belongs to 'er to gamble with; I expect that's what's between them. I don't know how the

thing is to be done, how we're going to get rid of Kenny. Cruel he has been, and 'e never maintained 'er, and 'e stopped away for five years."

"She condoned that," interrupted Errington quickly, "there has been a resumption of co-habitation since then."

"Well, perhaps there has, and perhaps there has not. I don't know about that. You had best 'ave a talk with Lil. She may 'ave something to tell you that she won't tell her father. She won't go back to 'im, she says. I don't care 'ow you work it, but I want her to be shut of 'im for once and for always."

"She wants to see me alone?"

"Yes, that's what we've settled. After she has put the boy to bed she will see you in the libery. She don't take long over it, so say the word when you're ready. What do you think of that cigar? I gave one hundred and twenty shillings for them. It's a '94. There's not been a good cigar in the market since then."

The cigar, the dinner, the wine, had all been good. Manny had not said a word too much in their praise. Errington joined warmly in Manny's encomium.

After another glass or two of the Lafitte, he was summoned to that interview with Lilian.

It took place in the library, that quaintly named library, where there were no books, but only upholstery and the smell of smoke.

Errington, reminding himself that he was there primarily to plead Kenny's cause, soon after he had placed a chair for her, and got through the few necessary commonplaces, began by talking airily about the differences that so often arise between young married couples in the first years of their lives together. But, whilst he talked,

he noticed the long thick lashes of her dark eyes, the fine poise of her head, the red softness of her lips. Certainly, the wine had quickened his appreciation of his client's appearance.

"It's not 'differences' between Kenny and me, it is not anything slight," she interrupted without apology, "it is just that Kenny is impossible. I've tried my best to get on with him, but he makes me mad. Is that what you've come to talk to me about? About being reconciled to Kenny! For, if that is all, it is no use. I must be divorced from him. Then he need not bother about me at all, he will be quite free. My father says you can do it if you like, and what I want is a divorce."

"Is that all you want?" he said dryly. "Only a divorce!" But he looked at her, and it was his expression she answered.

"It's easy to be good. But Kenny can't be good. And he says it's plebeian, *bourgeois*, common." Her voice dropped, she repeated Kenny's words as if they burnt her lips.

"Is it so easy to be good?" questioned Errington, catching at her words, but with his eyes intent on her. He knew he would like to teach her that it is not easy. His pulses were beating rather faster than they had for some time past, and quite definitely the wish to teach her formed itself in his mind. "Is it easy to be good?" he repeated.

Her colour rose higher, as she felt the intention of his glance, as her woman's instinct taught her there was a meaning behind his words. She grew embarrassed and awkward, and moved restlessly towards the window, away from his eyes.

"You are trying to make me change my mind," she

went on, when she recovered her self-possession, "that is what you are trying to do. But it's no use, it's not a bit of use."

"I am going to succeed in making you change your mind, unless you are very different from what I imagine you to be, unless you are a much worse woman than I imagine you to be, harder, more cruel," he replied.

She flamed out at him. Of course there was something in what Kenny had said. She was not well-bred, she lacked self-restraint. But, what a grace there was in her swift movements, how alluring were the soft liquid eyes when the light of indignation shone in their depths!

"I don't care what you imagine me, I don't care for your opinion of me. You are not good yourself, I know that, Aunt Elsa told me so this morning; and she said you know things that would help me to get rid of Kenny. I want to be free!"

"But none of us are free! That is the tragedy of life." He too moved from his place, and began to walk about the room. Her words illumined his memory.

"We bind shackles on ourselves in our youth, and we can never tear them off. If we do, the marks of them are there, forever graven in our flesh. I am not talking to you as if we were acquaintances of an hour. It is a vital issue that you are approaching, and one cannot take vital issues as if they were three-barred gates. You must pause and reflect where your leap will land you. You want a divorce. What are you going to do with your life? You have youth, beauty, money, a young son. What are you going to do with that freedom you crave? Do you want a divorce in order to marry your cousin, the nephew of whom your father speaks?"

"How dare you say such things to me?"

"You will find I dare say anything to you that will help you against yourself."

Now they faced each other again, and, if he saw the light of indignation fade out of her dark eyes, she saw no less the growing softness in his strange green ones; and she read the sympathy in them too. A quick rush of remorse came to her, because she had believed what Aunt Elsa had told her, believed that he was a bad man, although she knew what a liar Aunt Elsa was. It was characteristic of Lilian to be impressionable and easily moved.

Now she threw her burden on to him, impulsively.

"I don't know what to do; tell me what I ought to do. How can I go on living with Kenny? He hates me, he makes me hate him. I am in a passion from morning until night." Her vehement words were matched by her glowing cheeks. "You don't know what he has done, anything of what he has done. He jeers and sneers at me before my boy, and at my father, my good kind father."

"Poor little girl!"

He said it so softly, so gently, that the ready tears gathered in her eyes. And now she found that he had taken the impulsive hand she had held out, and was holding it in friendly grasp.

"Poor little girl! And you ought to have nothing but kindness! You ought to have some one to love you, care for you, when the days are long, and a little empty, and only love can fill them. And you are such a child yourself, such a child. I must indeed think how to advise you, what to do for you."

The position was terribly difficult for her, either way

she moved there would be danger. He talked to her of lonely days and nights. He made her colour come and go. He moved her with argument.

When once he succeeded in unlocking her speech, she grew strangely, dangerously, confidential to him. Kenny indeed treated her outrageously. Errington soon felt that, if he persuaded her to go back to her husband, he must stand between him and her. He must, for a time at least, act as third in their married life, reconciling them to each other, teaching them, especially teaching her, his creed of compromise. There was something alluring in the prospect. The girl was impulsive, emotional. She had flung at him the indictment, based on Elsa Beethoven's evidence, that he too was bad. Now she was sorry for what she had said, he could see the unspoken apology in the way she appealed to him. She could not do enough to show that she was sorry.

He went on talking.

"I don't believe in pulling up one's landmarks; I believe rather in replanting them—with a difference." His personality added to the impressiveness of his speech; already she was beginning to realise this.

"If the yew-tree hedge fails, let us try the eucalyptus. If there are no late roses blooming on the hedges beside the paths we walked in our youth, and the shrubs are black and shrivelled with frosts, let us level them. But, in the place where they have been, let us put up a rockery, where green hardy plants can pierce their way through the stone crevices. Come, let us talk it over, let us see what can be done. You must not make wreckage of your life. There is no happiness for you in what you want to do."

"Oh! I shall never be happy." Her eyes grew tragic. "I suppose I don't deserve it. I ran away from father with Kenny; he was so different from everybody I had ever known, I thought him like a young god, he was so handsome. I never thought of father, or anything but that Kenny wanted me to marry him. I was so proud of it. All the rest is my punishment. But I want to do right now; and it can't be right to let Everard grow up in such an atmosphere."

"Well, I don't think his little mind is very clear yet," Errington said, smiling at the remembrance of "Macfello." "I think you may risk his not taking a great deal of notice, intelligent notice, of anything he hears."

"But does Kenny want me to come back?"

She had said she hated him. Yet it was having been here a week, without a sign from him, that had hurt her, and had prompted her to fall in with her father's urgent desire for a divorce.

It was Errington's understanding of good women, that new understanding which Berenice had given him, that helped him to divine Lilian. She had lain in the man's arms, she had borne him a child, the least kindness from him would have held her, kept her. Errington realised her possibilities, saw what Kenny was throwing away. If only the fellow had any good in him! But in any case he must have his chance. It was the Sphinx who had ordained it.

"Certainly he wants you to go back. I was with him nearly all yesterday. It is really at his instance I am here."

She was incredulous at first. It was with difficulty

Errington persuaded her that her husband really wanted her. In the end, he thought it better to tell her something of the truth. For he knew what she must do, what he must tell her to do, though at first he had not the words for it, because his judgment was against him. Who could float into harbour such a derelict as Kenny? Was he not asking her, instead, to sink with him? Was he not taking out of her hands her last chance of safety? He dared not think, he must go on with his mission.

But he softened perilously towards his victim. He vowed himself to her service, he would stand by her in staunch friendship, he would help her with sympathy and understanding, he would stand by both of them if he succeeded in saving Kenny from the results of his imprudence, and bringing him and his wife together in amity.

"Listen," he began. She raised her head at the altered timbre of his voice.

"Any woman could do what you proposed doing, any weak girl can shuffle out of a difficult place, lie herself out of it, wriggle free. You might be able to get a divorce from your husband, with me to help you, by lying and exaggeration, by abandoning modesty, decency, truth. I won't deceive you about that, it could be done; the divorce laws are very elastic, the judges easily imposed upon."

He began to walk about the room again, he could not face her eyes. He knew he was going to succeed, but his coming success was bitter in his mouth.

"But this is not the course for you. You belong to a race noted for their virtue, for the fine qualities of their women. You are not going to degrade the race,

your sex, by leaving Kenny to his fate, by attacking him at a moment when he is most vulnerable." He paused again, purposely, to create an effect.

"Most vulnerable?" she questioned, her interest quickly roused. "How? in what way?"

"Kenny has got himself into a terrible scrape, a scrape so terrible that it might end in social ostracism, disgrace, imprisonment."

"That was what Aunt Elsa came to tell me . . . and I wouldn't listen. . . . Was that what Aunt Elsa came to tell me?" she asked breathlessly. "Go on," she said to him, "I must hear, go on."

"You have the boy to think of, to count the cost to the boy. If a prison stain were on his father——"

"Prison! Good Heavens! Prison! What has he done?"

"He has done nothing," he answered quickly. "But he has got into bad company. He has let himself be suspected. It might be difficult, it might be impossible, to prove his innocence."

"How can I help? What can I do?"

He saw how easily he could influence her, how he could make his appeal. He answered decisively, as if he himself had no doubts.

"Be strong, instead of weak. Stand beside, instead of against, the man in whose arms you have lain, to whom you have borne a child. Whatever his faults, you are his wife. The tie between you is eternal; you may try to break it, but the child is the pledge of it between you. It is child as well as husband you will fling to the wolves if you drive on recklessly to the divorce courts."

He went on talking. He had great gifts of tact, of intuition; and his life with Berenice had taught him how good women feel. He slurred over Kenny's character, Kenny's unkindness. It was of Lilian he was thinking, of her and her son, he told her. If she would go back to Eton Avenue, at once, to-day, and let Kenny join her there, when the time came that he could do so with safety, be seen with him, be prepared, if necessary, to say that he had been with her at such and such a time, she would save herself from what might be a lifetime of regret, her son from what might be a lifetime of obloquy. He spoke, as only he could speak, of prison indignities and their result on character. Kenny had still his self-respect, if he were deprived of that. . . .

Of course he succeeded. All his arguments moved her. He appealed to all her fineness. She had pride of race and pride of maternity, and a personal pride. If Kenny was in trouble she must go back to him. Perhaps (it was a poor, forlorn "perhaps," like a dim light against the black background of that return to Eton Avenue) he would be grateful to her, and become kinder. Her hatred for him was a weak thing compared with what her love for him might have been, might yet be, if he depended on her.

There was aroused in her by Errington, as he spoke, an inherent womanly longing to be of service. And, if she could serve Kenny, she might come again to love him. She would try. There had been moments when she thought he loved her, she had seen sometimes in his eyes that he did not despise her. Now she would go to him with help in her hands.

Dimly, for alas! he had disappointed her too often for it to be aught but dimly, hope dawned to light her sacrifice.

Their interview left her with this will-o'-the-wisp of hope. It shone from Errington's green eyes. He would be her friend, would stand by her in her married life.

CHAPTER XIV

MANNY HENRY was not satisfied when he heard from Errington, and from his daughter, that she was going back to Eton Avenue. For, once Errington had inspired her, she was as passionately bent on the one course as she had been on the other. She would have liked to join Kenny in Spain immediately; she was with difficulty persuaded that it was unnecessary. She was unformed in mind, undisciplined, impulsive, full of possibilities for good or evil, but it had become suddenly definite with her that, if Kenny was in trouble, her place was by his side. She was bitterly ashamed she had left him. Her father knew her too well to try to control or persuade her, but he spoke his mind freely to her lawyer.

"It won't last—you mark my words—it won't last," he said. "You're a clever fellow, and you've talked her over; I saw all the time, what you 'ad in your mind. And I daresay you've done what you thought right. But Kenny is a worthless, drunken, lazy blackguard, and it can't turn out well."

He was very cast down and dispirited. He went on:

"Did I ever tell you how Lil's mother died? She ran something into her foot one day, and the place festered. She doctored it with ointments, she treated it with poultices; she laid up, and the doctor put it in splints. Nothing did it no good. When she got thoroughly ill, I called in a big pot, and he said it was

gangrened. He said that if she didn't 'ave 'er toe off, she'd 'ave to 'ave her foot off, she'd soon 'ave to 'ave her leg off, and if she didn't 'ave 'er leg off, why she'd go off herself!

" 'Not me,' she says, 'I'm not goin' to have my toe cut off. I've 'ad it forty-one years, I've got used to it, and I'm going to keep it.' We couldn't move 'er from that. Well! it spread, the badness spread—and she died. I've often thought of that. Kenny is just a bad toe. 'E ought to be cut off. Lil and the boy, and me, are clean and well, let's cut the festering limb off from us. If we don't, it will spread and spread, to me or to Lil, or to the boy. We shall suffer, you mark my words, Kenny will spread, bad will come of it—*cut 'im off*. That's my last word. You and she can settle what you like, I've heard all you've got to say. But you 'aven't moved me, not a hair. And there's scripture for it too, 'If an eye offend thee'—Eh? "

" 'There's something in the same book about 'seventy times seven,' I think, Mr. Henry," Errington answered him, laughingly, as he bade him good-night.

But Manny's misgivings were not without their echoes in his own breast. These were in his mind the next morning, when he breakfasted with his wife, and showed himself so irritable and hard to please.

Lilian would want a woman friend to stand beside her in the life she was pledged to resume with Kenny. Yet, misguided instinct prevented him, or delayed him, asking this service of Berenice. Elsa Beethoven was Lilian's aunt, he did not want his wife to meet Elsa. Then, there was the Sphinx! She had told him she intended to see much of Kenny's wife, to teach her to adapt herself to him. What could Berenice do in such

an atmosphere, save grow contaminated? No! that was impossible, she was invincibly white, and could take no stain; but still, he persuaded himself, he must not expose her to it.

He thought of Lillian with increasing pity, but it was himself, and not his wife, he would trust to help her.

He went up to see her more than once in the few days that it was necessary to keep Kenny away. She was intelligent, companionable, eager, and quick to learn, very conscious of her deficiencies. When he talked *entourage* to her, and persuaded her, and himself, that Kenny's virtues would flourish better if she would add palms to her pretty drawing-room, flowers to her dinner-table, cushions to her sofas, he had a ready listener. She was quick in learning, already in that week of Kenny's absence she made strides in her social education. She gathered so soon, on so slight a hint, that it was unnecessary to intrude her race and religion constantly upon the attention of her chance acquaintances. She might be proud of both, but, if she were proud of her hair, or her teeth, or her complexion, she would still behave modestly in not mentioning them. She was really humble-minded, she took all Errington's hints, and suggestions and advice to heart, and profited by all of them.

That he came to her as he did, so frequently and informally, and treated her with such tender and considerate *camaraderie*, won tempestuous gratitude from her. He hushed her words of gratitude. She was not yet quite at ease with him, but his influence over her grew.

The business connected with the Portland Place affair gave him long and anxious work. To find out

what Scotland Yard knew, and what were its intentions, was in itself a task of infinite difficulty. Only one of the prisoners was the actual client of the office; but he was one of the old gang, and Errington could not refuse to help him. And there was only one way to avoid Algernon Heseltine's fate for him. From hatred of imprisonment and its results, from abhorrence of the physical cruelty and moral degradation of it, Errington could never free himself. Lord Belville was neurotic and ill and old. Why torture him to death? His viciousness was feeble and emasculate, it could not attract or corrupt.

Such argument had the inevitable result. Lord Belville's appearance at the police court was his first and last appearance in the case, or, it may be added, in England. His recognisances were estreated. It was with difficulty the firm of Kennard and Carker, respectable and important as they were, escaped the consequences of their client's disappearance. Awkward questions were asked and complications threatened. That, in the end, orders were issued from high quarters that the matter was to be dropped, made the immediate position no less delicate and dangerous.

Kenny's return had been delayed; it was better he should take no risks. Lilian was ready to go out to him, ready to receive him at home, ready to swear anything that was necessary, even to his having been with her at any particular date. She was now quite as eager to be of use as she had been determined on cutting herself adrift from him.

The time came when Errington was convinced that Kenny du Gore had been neither seen nor recognised, but, in the meantime, he had certainly done all and

more than he had promised in influencing Kenny's wife. Berenice, during these anxious and distracting weeks, saw her husband strained and ill at ease, unlike himself. He was spasmodically gay, at other times silent, satirical, or even irritable, but he was always her beloved, and she thought it was his conscience that was troubling him on account of his conduct to her brother. She strove to show him that it had made no difference between them, that she in no way resented it. But an intangible barrier had arisen between them; she was shut out from his confidence. She thought it was Harry who stood between her and her husband, she could not banish the memory of that evening when Errington had almost said it.

But Harry himself was ill, unhappy, troubled, and she could not stay away from him; she felt his need of her. When, rarely, she thought of herself, it was to know that the craving for Errington's love and confidence was agonising, overwhelming. Her heart had constant ache for him.

She went much into society, too, just now. She would not allow the conversation to be hurriedly dropped on her approach, when she realised, that it was the Portland Place trial, or the scene at the dinner-table, that had been under discussion, that Errington's fitness to represent the Kent constituency was being questioned by those who commented, remembered, or wished to hear the detail, of his connection with the Heseltine case. Quite simply she gave her version of it to the cavillers, the version she had evolved. It was not so very far from the truth, and her belief in it influenced many of her hearers.

To her, it seemed always that Errington had been

moved in his actions by pity, by the friendliness of him to whom all the world had once stood friend. She spoke eloquently of what Algernon Heselstine had suffered, and of the death he had died.

There is no doubt she made her effect. Errington was not asked to withdraw his name, no steps antagonistic to his interests were taken by the party.

But the knowledge of the hostile undercurrents, of the delicacy of the position, filled her with dismay when she realised that her husband was actually engaged on behalf of the prisoners in the Portland Place case, that already there were rumours of the escape of one of the principal malefactors, and that Errington had been cognisant of his flight. Still, it is possible she would have lacked the courage to open the subject with her husband, had not the divided duty suddenly become single, the barred gate to his confidence suddenly reopened.

Harry's cough had increased, a growing emaciation had become evident, one day a slight hæmorrhage alarmed them both, and in haste they had sought the rooms of one of the popular consultants, who made the lungs a specialty. The usual biassed and valueless opinion was procured. Harry's lungs were affected by the sudden change of climate. The London fogs were doing him harm; he must get away at once. The Riviera, St. Moritz, Davos Platz? It was all one to Sir Marmion Stuke, who was holiday-making himself over Christmas, and had no need of patients until February. He bowed them out of the room with as much courtesy as his next appointment allowed him time for.

It had been decided that Harry should go to San

Remo. It was Harry's departure for Italy that freed Berenice; for now there was no incident in her daily life over which she must slur. When she kissed Harry good-bye on the cold foggy platform at Victoria at nine o'clock that winter morning, her anxiety about his health was dimmed and overshadowed by the beating of her heart, by her hurry to get away, to go back to Errington, who knew her early errand, whose smile had made her think that it was only for this he had been waiting. She could not know that his own anxieties were lessened, the worst difficulties surmounted.

Harry looked well that morning, his eyes were bright, his cheeks were flushed; Berenice's trouble for him was quite subordinate to her anxiety as to whether his departure would influence Errington's manner to her, and bring him back to her.

Indeed, for many reasons, Errington was glad that Harry Annesley was leaving England. Harry's fresh complications were not such a secret from him as they were from his sister. For, now and again, a word from Manny Henry, or from Lilian, or from the two of them together, made him aware that Elsa Beethoven had been talking to them of his wife, or of her brother. And he knew Elsa so well; now and again he had a certain vague uneasiness lest her intimacy with Harry Annesley should prove mischievous. She was certainly not visiting the Albany so constantly for *le bon motif*.

Of course, there was no secret about his own visits to the house in Eton Avenue; they had been business, pure business. And now Kenny was on his way back. But Errington had a new sensitiveness to gossip, and it seemed to him that, when Harry was gone, the source of it would be cut off.

So Berenice's expectations were more than realised. Errington met her in the hall, and relieved her of her wraps; chid her gently for venturing out on so inauspicious a morning, and drew her into the morning-room, where a second breakfast awaited her. He had ordered it himself, when he heard that she had gone out after only a hurried cup of tea. It was sweet for her to be waited upon by him, to feel the old kindness in his manner, and see the dear light of affection in his eyes.

Presently she had finished her breakfast; they were talking as, but a few long weeks ago, they had talked daily. Suddenly they were back in the beautiful intimacy of happy married life. But, when the conversation turned on his electoral chances, painful and difficult as it was, she felt she must tell him what she knew, caution him where he was in jeopardy.

She approached the matter timidly, apologetically. He encouraged her to speak out. He had hated the new home atmosphere, and fought with himself to clear it; his feeling for his wife had not varied, it was only that his nerves had played him tricks when he was in her company. He wanted things to be as they had been. His intercourse with Lilian made the assurance of his devotion to his wife imperative.

He listened to Berenice as she tried to tell him what she feared. The diffident tenderness with which she spoke showed him again the loveliness of her nature. Not of herself was she thinking, nor place nor power for herself had part in her thoughts; but she could not let him imperil his ambitions, his just ambitions, because she feared to let him know what people were saying.

He drew her down to his knee quite soon after she began to speak, and made her rest her head against his shoulder. Her eyes had grown a little tired these days, her face a little pale.

"So you think I should not have taken up this case, not have jeopardised my chances?"

"I think whatever you do is right." There was a little break in her voice. Short as had been their estrangement, she had suffered greatly under it. Now that she was back in her place with him it was difficult to keep from tears. "I always think what you do is right."

She hoped he would know all for which she could not find words. A little kiss lay, with a tear, on his coat sleeve before she went on:

"But the election will be in January, they think. Although there is no other candidate before them, they won't put forward one whose—whose conduct can be questioned. It has occurred so often, always on our side—that a non-political point has proved stronger than politics. And the fight will be uphill, anyway. They are so uninstructed; Free Trade is such a simple shibboleth, with tradition behind it, and all the misconceptions of changing circumstances."

"How well you have been coached!" He stroked her hair; how fine it was and soft! "So they have told you all that? And what am I to do, what do you think I am to do? Abandon everything to my own advancement?"

"Is it your own advancement only? You are such a passionate Protectionist, is it not for the country's good that you should be in the House?"

"The greatest good of the greatest number! Yes,

perhaps, perhaps that would be altruism set to music. You are a very special pleader, my wife of wives."

And, holding her in his arms, he wondered how little he should tell her.

Of course, he knew, he knew as well as Berenice did, that the candidate for the Kent constituency must be beyond reproach. The prurient purity of the provincial mind was no secret to him. But there was nothing to be definitely said, or proved, against him. Lord Belville was in Egypt, and Kenny du Gore was back in Eton Avenue. The case had been already heard, chiefly in camera, and nothing had transpired that could affect his position.

Because he was safe, he could afford to be disingenuous. She had spoken of Lord Belville, well, he would tell her of Kenny du Gore. He was growing interested in Lilian, he liked talking round and about her.

"It was the Sphinx who asked me to take up the matter. Harry Belville is one of Algernon's oldest friends, and, as for Kenny du Gore——"

He sketched Kenny's career, giving her a Bowdlerised version of it; his father was well known to everybody. He told her vaguely of Kenny's peril, then that he had a wife. Manny Henry was described, mimicked. His egotism and accent were brought out, his peculiarities accentuated. When, incidentally, Berenice heard it was his daughter that Kenny du Gore had married, the inference was obvious.

"But they have a boy, a fascinating, charming little fellow. He is like the old General, a splendid little chap; I think he will bear his grandfather's name worthily. Now, tell me, wife of mine, could I let him go through life stained, tainted by his father's convic-

tion? Come, tell me your mind. You know them all now—Belville, who is over sixty, one leg in the grave, a warning, not a temptation; Manny Henry, who adores his daughter; Kenny, who meant no evil when he went to that unhappy house; Everard, that dear boy; the Sphinx, who called on me, by the memory of old times, to help them through. Should I have given them all up, let what might happen to them, in order to write M.P. after my name? Come, you have never advised me, advise me now. Should I have let the whole thing slide, Kenny and his wife, and his little son, Belville and the Sphinx? Should I have saved my skin, or not risked it, at the expense, or possible expense, of theirs? Or was I right to stick to my guns, at any cost, and find my reward in having once more dodged the cruelty of the Criminal Laws, saved man once more, from the inhumanity of man?"

Her nature had not the lightness of his. His appeal for her opinion was scarcely serious, but she took it seriously. She did not answer him quickly, she was too happy to feel his arms about her again, to know herself safe in the shelter she so loved. Yet, though she knew the way his inclination lay, the answer he wished her to make, she had the courage of her convictions.

"You are right, dear, exquisitely right, in much that you say, in all that you feel. But I cannot forget what Norman used to tell me: 'Characters never alter, they only develop. Plant a potato, and never mind how much you dress, or top dress the soil, it is only a potato will come up.' And 'if there is a flaw in the seed, there will be a flaw in the fruit.' To save old Lord Belville from Algernon Heseltine's fate was good. But Kenny du Gore! He is young, if he should develop in vice, if

his wife should suffer through him—I have a feeling, a dread, I don't know why, I can't explain it, a presentiment, as if evil might come of it."

These were Manny Henry's words.

"I shan't take my eyes off him. I can make him behave properly to his wife; it means the sacrifice of a few afternoons, an occasional evening."

Disingenuousness was not a difficulty with him, he revelled in it. He promised Berenice he would not neglect the interests of Kenny du Gore's wife.

"But—but—" it was difficult, it was painful to her, But she must be open with him, and tell him her mind. "Is it worth while? Is he worth the sacrifices? It may be asked, what you owe him, or—or any of them, that you give yourself, your political friends, this—this anxiety about you. If you go to his house, are intimate with him in a way——"

But still her arms were about him, and her head was against his breast. It was charming of her to care so much; her shyness too was charming. She was the ideal wife, the ideal woman; he did not underrate what he possessed.

In all seriousness he promised he would not compromise himself by an intimacy with Kenny du Gore. He enjoyed for the moment the exquisite irony of the suggestion she so unconsciously made. All his natural gaiety and good-humour returned to him. He even asked after Harry's health, and hoped his trip would benefit him. He went off to the office in the highest spirits.

CHAPTER XV

SINCE his marriage, until now, Errington Welch-Kennard had not fallen from a certain ideal of conduct and thought. Whether, through the recurring influence of the Sphinx, or the old associations that this new case revived, or mere reaction, at this moment his ideals shifted; or, at least, he had an optical delusion of their shifting. There is no doubt Lilian du Gore, as an "adventure," or a "chance," or the eternal feminine, naturally man's prey, occupied the place in his mind that should have been filled with weightier affairs.

Immediately after the police court stage of the proceedings, Kenny had returned, and, as Berenice had correctly predicted, Kenny was practically unaltered. He was still utterly selfish, unreliable in money matters, fond of champagne.

But Lilian was different. The lawyer, seeing her so often, for, although the excuse of keeping her aware of what was going on was over, the habit of going up to Eton Avenue after business hours had not been dropped, was conscious of a new humility and softness in her.

It was her nature to be quickly moved, passionate, and impulsive. It was her misfortune to have had only a High School education, to be unread and uncultured; but she had the instinct of self-improvement. Kenny had attracted her by his superficial superiority, Errington impressed her by his difference from both him and

her father. She came to hang on his words, she wanted desperately that he should think well of her. If he mentioned a book, she eagerly procured and read it; once he spoke of some one as dressing "flamboyantly," and from that time she wore only grey or brown.

She knew he noted and approved. Sometimes she caught a gleam in his eyes that told her so. If there was more than approval to be read in that gleam, she had not read it. He was in every way so far removed from her.

How could she dream that her unconsciousness tempted him? Errington knew it was he who was giving the impetus to her development. That he should profit nothing by it in his personal relations with her would be unfair. Perhaps the beginning and end of it was that his vanity was piqued.

Errington Welch-Kennard had his weakness, the weakness of most men. Lilian du Gore found her way to it. She hurt his vanity, she piqued that vanity peculiar to a man beyond his fortieth year, who has been *homme galant* in his youth. For, although she was so proud of his friendship for her, and was developing visibly under his tuition, she neither blushed at his coming nor paled at his going. It was he who had told her it was her duty to return to Kenny. He had praised her race, her people, she would prove his praise was justified; that was all.

Kenny's habitual half-contemptuous manner, his want of words to express his gratitude or appreciation, his carelessness and apparent indifference, gave her no help. But, nevertheless, her character and capacity grew with her endeavours to improve.

Errington spoke of Lilian to the Sphinx when he

went to report how well things had gone at Bow Street, and Sybil, divining more than he told, grew curious about her. She asked Kenny not very long after his return, to bring Lilian to Hans Crescent. He was very flattered by the invitation.

"It is very kind of you, but I'm afraid she will bore you. She doesn't know anything of the world, you know. She is all right in her way, and, of course, she behaved very well over that affair. Kennard admires her, he was there nearly every afternoon while I was away. But she isn't your type."

"Dear Kenny! which is it, are you a little proud of her, or a little ashamed? Anyway, I'm interested, I want to see her. Bring her up to-morrow."

So Kenny took her to Hans Crescent one afternoon; having first rendered her completely nervous, and ill at ease, by his instructions as to her behaviour. Under the circumstances, as was natural, the visit was a complete failure. Lilian was irritated by all she had been told, uneasy as to the impression she would produce, awkward through his very anxiety, and altogether at her worst.

And the Sphinx, without intending it, immediately aggravated her unresponsive mood. Lilian did not understand satire or irony, she resented the tone of the conversation between her hostess and her husband. The Sphinx's abnormal hair and pallor made an unwholesome impression, her strange talk accentuated it. Lilian could not doubt her state of health. Poor Sybil could hardly move, and the lines of suffering about her sunken eyes and pathetic mouth were too clear to be misread. It was a dying woman who jeered and jested. All the wholesome natural instincts of Kenny's wife

rose up and rebelled against the exotic atmosphere of the Hans Crescent drawing-room, and its paralysed mistress.

"It was so sweet of you to come and see me," Sybil had said. "Why didn't you tell me your wife was so handsome, Kenny? She is adorable; I like that *mutine* mouth, scarlet-lipped, those somber sullen eyes. But tell me, now do tell me, why you dress so badly. I am so out of the world. Is it the vogue now to be badly dressed, or do you think it more effective, more original? You must come to me, without Kenny, one morning, and talk chiffons. Brown! Now do explain to me what makes you wear brown. I should have thought scarlet or orange, and heavy scents, mystery and magnolia blossoms, were more in your style. That is what I understood from Errington, that you accentuated the East in you, not ignored it. But, of course, you have some point of view, some reason for it. It is quite daring, quite new. You must bring her to one of my parties, Kenny. You'll be the only woman, you'll like that, you'll have a *succès fou*. I should not be in the least surprised if Frank Dickenson suggests you grow whiskers, that is his way of making love. And how do you like my lawyer?" she went on, to Lilian, who was scarlet with rage or shame, and looked handsomer than ever. "Quite beautiful, isn't he? But you mustn't flirt with him, you mustn't have an affair with him; he is quite devoted to his wife. And all that he has over is mine, isn't it, Kenny? You know all about him and me, don't you? Or haven't you thought it fit for her? Dear boy! You know your husband has always been jealous of him, don't you?"

Lilian looked both sullen and insulted. Sybil's

conversational methods were not those of Russell Square.

"And why did they call you Lily? I suppose it was because you are so dark. I think Brooking would admire her," she went on, contemplatively regarding her silent and indignant guest, "if I prepared him a little. He hasn't been in love since he was in love with Berenice Darcy. I suppose you are awfully dull with Kenny? Brooking is quite amusing, an artist, too, in his way, but so general, a born collector; it is curiosity with him, not interest. But you won't mind that, he is so brilliant. Yes! I must bring you together. You really deserve assistance in your domestic felicity with Kenny. Kenny is such a bad boy. Shall I send Brooking to survey the landscape? You'll dress carefully the first time, won't you? Of course, we must avoid the mandoline effect. But there are possibilities, great possibilities."

Lilian said afterwards that Sybil looked at her as if she were a model! It was all very light and flippant and meaningless. The Sphinx was racked with physical agony all the time she was speaking, she could hardly command her voice. And she meant to be kind to Kenny's wife, to show her that she appreciated her action; to put her in the way of attracting, of keeping, her husband's interest. But pain tore at her, so it seemed essential she should jest and smile and show no sign of it. She was glad to see the two together. In her sentient moments she was full of gratitude to Lilian, as to Errington, for saving Kenny from the consequence of the mission she had imposed on him. She had told Errington, and herself, passionately, that she could not have died, if she had had the responsibility of Kenny's ruin. And she so craved for death. But, without mor-

phia to lull her, she was hardly sane in these last days. Her renunciation of the drug since Kenny had been in danger was pitifully brave. She had not taken ease since his peril. The words she wanted for Lilian were none of the words she spoke.

No one understood her but Errington. He tried to explain her to Lilian, when he saw her the next day, and she told him how she hated and resented the Sphinx.

"I know now that it is she who has encouraged Kenny to be what he is, it is to her that I owe everything," she said tragically. She had none of Berenice's wide charity, he could not make her see into the springs of this distorted conduct, although he had had such influence with her. She was really of narrow outlook, with one idea, like a child, or an anti-vivisectionist.

Her one idea was the one that Errington Welch-Kennard had taught her. It was that, having taken Kenny du Gore for her husband, she owed him loyalty and allegiance. It did not yet occur to her that she was learning more than this from the lawyer. She conceived a great distrust of, and aversion, to the Sphinx, and rightly conjectured her influence over Kenny had been bad.

The discussions between her and the lawyer on this subject were frequent. Perhaps to hear Errington so warm in the Sphinx's defence, and even in her praises, made another point against her. Lilian had got the word "friendship" very definitely in her mind, but she was jealous in her friendships! Kenny did not improve matters when he came home one afternoon early from the club; and, finding Everard reciting one of his little pieces to the lawyer, said:

"She bores you with the boy, I suppose! That is in self-defence, that is because the Sphinx warned her

not to flirt with you; she looks upon the boy as a protection against you!" He laughed that obnoxious soft laugh of his which his wife hated.

"She is awfully respectable, she must have her flirtations chaperoned."

"I don't flirt. How dare you say it, you know it isn't true; it's wicked to say such things!"

Her scarlet cheeks and indignant protest seemed to amuse Kenny, to encourage him.

"Does she try to flirt with you, Kennard? By the fuss she is making I suppose she does. I don't suppose she is very good at it, no subtlety, eh?"

He had an easy familiar way of looking at, and speaking to, his wife. Whatever high opinion he might have of her good qualities, there was no doubt he was still under the impression that he had married beneath him. He made it always evident both to Errington and herself that this was so.

"Virtue is one of the most prominent middle-class shibboleths. I bet she'll play it off on you in the end. Don't you expect anything from her. And what do you think of the boy? Not much of the bucket-shop-keeper about him, is there? He's a thorough du Gore."

"I'd rather he were dead," she cried, bursting into tears, gathering the child up in her arms, "than grow up to be like you, cruel, and jeering and bad."

It was so easy to try her new self-restraint beyond its weak limit, and Kenny found it amusing. Even Errington noticed how emotion became her, and added brilliancy to her sombre beauty.

"There she goes," Kenny spoke in the same soft even tone, "one fit of temper after another. I had begun to think she was improving. But there is no repose

about her; nothing of the Vere de Vere. And what am I supposed to have done now?"

"You live on my father, you eat his food, you wear his clothes. He works for us, for you and for me. You teach the boy to despise him."

"I suppose I ought to send him to a fried-fish shop to learn manners. Eh! young un? You'd like to be like Grandpa Henry, wouldn't you, and keep a shop?"

"I want to be a soldier, I want to be like Grandpa General," a flush came over the fair face, he wrenched himself from his mother's arms. "I don't want to keep a shop, and be a tradesman."

"That's right, so you shall. Stand up like a man, and don't let your mother molly-coddle you. Don't go, Kennard, stay and have a whiskey and soda and a chat. There are two or three things I want to talk to you about. Did you get that whiskey I told you?" he asked Lilian, who had recovered from her sudden rage, due perhaps to the presence of Errington.

"Yes," she said simply. "I'll get it for you."

"Oh! do fall into the way of letting the servants fetch and carry. Drop the Bloomsbury habits. What's the good of keeping dogs and doing your own barking?"

But he made no effort to ring, or to open the door for her. He let her wait on him, when she quickly returned with the tantalus, siphon, and glasses.

"She's not a bad sort. I told you she wasn't a bad sort. If you like Dewar she doesn't get you Kinnahan," he said to the lawyer afterwards, when they were alone. "But she wants a lot of training."

He went on presently:

"The Sphinx thinks she is handsome; you think so too, don't you? She says she would have a great success

if she were properly dressed. Her eyes are fine; don't you think her eyes are fine? Her hair is down to her waist, great waves of it, she's got, and she is thoroughly well-shaped. . . ."

He added a little more on the same subject.

With all Errington's faults, it would have been impossible for him to discuss his wife's physical points with another man. He thought Kenny loathsome, yet it was part of the responsibility he had taken, to keep friendly with him, to swallow his own disgust and let himself be made friend and *confidant*. He knew Kenny was the type of man who valued most that which other men admired, for the possession of which he was envied. That was one of the reasons why he must not give up his visits to Eton Avenue. And he must let Kenny see that he admired his wife. To carry out the programme the Sphinx had laid down for Kenny's rehabilitation, it would be well even to arouse his jealousy, to risk his noting the frequency of those visits.

It was all part of a plan, quite legitimate, and conceived in the right spirit; but his pique at Lilian's unconsciousness, at her lack of response to certain speeches, glances, suggestion, was not legitimate.

CHAPTER XVI

No ONE who saw with understanding eyes could withhold a tribute of admiration from Lilian during those trying days.

She was still in her twenties, naturally emotional, passionate and somewhat spoiled, painfully ignorant of life. Kenny never let her forget the difference in their social positions. The more he grew to respect her, the less it appeared in his manner. He jeered at her before visitors, before the servants, before her boy.

Her life was a continual fight against herself, for she wanted to fling out against Kenny, answer him, tell him what she thought, what she felt under his easy insolence. But, always his coolness, and something she saw in him of superior birth or breeding, some remnant of the time when he had been as a god in her eyes, left her degraded by her own passion, by her lack of self-control. It was a continual fight with her father, who, seeing her with pale cheeks and dark lines under her eyes, knew her unhappy, and urged her to return to his loving care, and the peace of Russell Square. It was a continual fight against the boy, wilful, full of spirit, encouraged in petty rebellion by his father, childishly rude and disobedient. When he defied or fought her, she lost her temper with him sometimes, being little more than a child herself, and a most unhappy one. When she was so quickly ashamed, for she loved the boy as Jewish mothers love their children, as only unloved

wives love their children, she suffered intolerably in her sense of unfitness to rear him.

In all her troubles, moods, difficulties, it was to Errington Welch-Kennard alone that she could turn for sympathy and understanding; and, at first, he acted his part so well, that her complete unconsciousness of him as a man was counterbalanced by her complete absorption in him as a mentor.

He paid daily, or almost daily, visits to Eton Avenue. Kenny was always glad to see him there, or to hear he had been. "He's the only decent person who ever comes here," he said often. Yet, to Kenny it was due that the Eton Avenue *habitués* were of indifferent character.

It was Errington who taught Lilian to hold a candle to the devil, to meet Kenny on his own ground. It was to earn Errington's praise and approbation that she set herself the task of yielding to Kenny's prejudices, pandering to his weaknesses, satisfying his vanity. She studied horses and cards, as, at sixteen, she had worked for her matriculation. If her impetus was the lawyer's approbation, and his reward her glowing eyes, with the intimacy that was gradually establishing itself between them, it was Kenny who benefited by both.

"Oh! Errington! I can't tell you what it is to me to hear that Kenny is all right. I heard he took his wife to Kempton on Saturday, that they were seen together with the boy on Sunday at the Zoo. I'm growing such a weak fool," there was a strange break in the Sphinx's voice, "that I pry into his domestic affairs. I put up with that hateful woman, Elsa Beethoven, in order to hear that Kenny has dined at home, or taken his wife to the theatre, or has been normal in some way or another. I must be coming to the end, Errington, I'm

changing so. I wish I could undo all the harm I've done."

But of the harm she *was* doing she knew nothing. It was to please her, Errington persuaded himself, that he continued to concern himself with the du Gore *méage*. The Sphinx was nearing her end. She heard, in that curious way she always had of acquiring knowledge, all that went on in the du Gore household. What she learnt was that Kenny was leading a life, if somewhat ignoble, yet not dangerously disreputable. He was dining at home two or three times a week, living apparently within the income his father-in-law allowed him, paying, if only an infinitesimal, yet a definite, dividend on the efforts that were being made to save him.

She liked to hear that Kenny was seen in public with his wife; and it was through Errington that this became a more and more frequent occurrence.

"I met young Tollemache yesterday," he would say carelessly. "He asked me who was that magnificent-looking woman he saw with you at Sandown last week."

Kenny liked being spoken of as having been seen with a magnificent-looking woman. Lilian was taken to Kempton, and to Hurst Park, to Windsor, and to Lewes. He liked her to be stared at, it is possible he grew to like having her with him, since her superior memory and intelligence taught her the various performances of the horses, and the details she culled from Ruff's Guide. And it was something to a man of Kenny's type to have a companion to find fault with when a favourite went down, or a "dead cert" was beaten.

If she had those weary days racing with Kenny, she had her compensation in those afternoons when he

played Bridge at the Piccadilly, coming home late, after that inevitably dilatory "last rubber," and Errington Welch-Kennard sat with her in that be-chintzed ground-floor drawing-room, and led her slowly but imperceptibly into a new and unknown world.

Errington was subtly but perpetually aware, nevertheless, that her virtue, instinctive, racial, was not consciously yielding, that he was taking, she not giving, the bloom of it under the pretence of friendship; yet, had she been less than she was, she would have held no temptation for him. Through Berenice he had learnt, past forgetting, that virtue is the last magic spell that beauty holds.

Lilian had no realisation of danger. Errington's strangely irised, brilliant eyes, and dominating personality, the strong soft tenderness of his handsome hands, his constant kindness and sympathy, the hours she waited for his coming, the efforts she made to please him, the knowledge how constantly he was in her thoughts, in the background of her dutifulness to Kenny, taught her nothing. He had persuaded her to return to her husband, he had promised her his friendship and help. He was keeping his promise, that was all. She was living to please him, hanging on his praises; this too taught her nothing.

In the early days Kenny had flung at her the reproach that she was a prude. He had made her believe that her innate modesty was merely part of the want of good manners and good breeding of the *bourgeois* class. How could she bear the same taunt, the same reproach, from Errington?

Therefore, she had accepted his first kiss with scarlet blush, but no demur. It was the afternoon of Kenny's

return. She had opened the door herself to the lawyer that day; her eyes were glowing.

"He came back this morning, and he was pleased to see me here, I could see he was pleased. He looks quite well and bronzed. Oh! I'm so glad you made me come back."

"Are you, child, are you? And I'm glad too." He had drawn her to him, kissed her, before she guessed his intention. The scarlet flush he answered with surprise:

"Surely you don't mind! I thought we were such friends."

The time came when there was something lacking in his greeting if his cheek failed to brush hers, the time came, too, when he easily found her lips instead of her cheek. And still there was no danger. She drifted but a little way with the currents he essayed to move in her. He was so much older than she; she had accepted him so unreservedly as counsellor. She was growing in many ways, and unconsciously her strength was pitted against his. Her strength lay in the very virtue that appealed to him, in her love for that wilful passionate boy of hers, in her growing, her ever-growing, sense of duty to the boy's father.

But those afternoon hours were sweet, perilously sweet. He came in one day when she had been having one of her tussels with Everard. She poured it all out to Errington. The boy was always delicate, the day was foggy, and she had ordered that he be kept in bed instead of going for his daily walk in the park. But it appeared that "Vilet" would be waiting for him, and her father had promised to meet them, and give them a "real" drill. Everard had said, "I *shall* go out, wevver

you like it or not, I won't be molly-coddled." He had made a rush to get past her, without hat or coat, to get into the street. She had caught him up in her arms, and he had kicked and struggled against her, biting her arms, struggling with all his childish might; and she had slapped him. She burst into tears when she told Errington of it, she had lost all her self-control. She had slapped him as hard as she could; but, ever since she had conquered him, put him to bed, reduced him to tears and obedience, her own tears had been flowing. Even now her hands were trembling, and the little sock on her knee that she had been attempting to mend before Errington came in, was wet and sodden with her tears, and the needle was rusted.

"I am not fit to have a child," she told him. "I don't deserve one. He'll hate me when he grows up. I try all I know, then, I lose my temper; he—he'll never respect or—love me." Her passion and her penitence, the dark and swimming eyes, her trembling hands, moved him.

"Dear, do you think, do you really think, he won't love you? Then, let me love you a little instead."

He came and sat beside her on the sofa, he put his arms about her.

"Poor little child, poor little lonely girlie. So she lost her temper! Do you think I don't know how difficult it is, and how brave you are, and good?"

She had exhausted herself with her fit of crying. There was no use telling Kenny any of her difficulties or troubles. He would only jeer at her for being unfit to manage the boy; but this friend of hers was comforting. She had never before consciously returned a caress of his. Now she let her head rest against his

shoulder, to cry there. The work fell from her lap to the floor.

"You know some one cares for you, don't you?" he whispered. She clung to him more closely.

Her delicate ear lay near his lips, and he caught it gently. She moved uneasily, but he had the art at his finger-tips.

"Don't you like me to do that? Then I won't do it." His arms, too, tightened about her, only to comfort her.

"Don't move, let me rest you. You like me to hold you, don't you? Tell me, don't be afraid of me, are you getting a little happier?"

The only light in the room was the flame of the fire.

"You are not afraid of me, are you?" he murmured, for he felt her shrinking from the growing liberty of his arms and lips. "I only want to comfort you."

She had grown accustomed to his light caresses. What was the difference in the embrace in which he now held her. Nothing! Still there was thrilling through her young loneliness and unhappiness a new emotion.

But, if he cared for her, if some one cared for her in this miserable world! She made no effort to separate herself from him. It was only a momentary abandonment, but his response was quick, instantaneous.

"Darling!"

For a moment he felt her young slenderness unresisting against him.

Of course, it was unfortunate, it was a thousand times unfortunate, that Aunt Elsa should come in just at this moment, that neither of them had heard her ring, that she was ushered in upon them without preparation or warning.

The close fire-lit room, the two figures that came apart so suddenly, under the quick illumination from the electric switch, provoked Elsa Beethoven into thin-lipped smile, and speech.

"So zis is how you amuse yourself, ven Kenny is at ze Club!"

But her sympathetic smile was wickedness itself. Lilian had no gift of quick retort. The scarlet her cheek hung out was the flag of shame. She felt a sudden horrible reaction and shame before him. She flung swiftly from the room, and there was a sound of a sob as she went.

Elsa and Errington were left facing each other, and neither of them was quite good to see.

"Zo, you have not altered," she began, and her eyes and face were wicked. "You are ze same as ever."

He was a man of resource, not one to be brow-beaten, socially blackmailed, even by a woman. He damned Elsa, internally; but it was of Lilian he was thinking. Poor little girl! He must get round the woman somehow, make her keep her mouth shut.

"Sit down, and don't make a fool of yourself." He smiled at her. He had never stood on ceremony with Elsa, she was to be dealt with only by direct methods.

"The girl is dull, lonely, and I'm sorry for her. Of course you could make a certain amount of mischief over what you have seen. And you must have been fearfully shocked," he added humorously. "What are you going to do about it? That is the important question. What do you conceive it your duty to do?"

"She is my niece, she is zo ignorant, innocent." Her slow evasiveness amused him. He knew she was exasperated by his taking it so lightly.

"There is no doubt you must do your duty," he continued gravely.

"Manny Henry ought to know vat is going on. I sink zat Manny would like to know. And zen zere is zat wife of yours, zat wife to whom I am dirt, who pass me by in ze street, who sink me not good enough to sit wiz her brozer. . . ."

Here she was genuine; it was obvious she resented Berenice's attitude. And, even at this moment, Errington was glad and proud that his wife recognised and avoided that which was at the very root of Elsa's being.

"Where have you met her?" he asked. "I did not know you had met my wife." He had known, but he wanted to draw her out.

"At Harry's rooms. I have met her zere often."

"Harry?" His eye-brows went up.

"And vy not 'Harry?' Your wife's brozer and I vos friends even before I knew you."

She simpered when she spoke of Harry Annesley as an old friend. The suggestion that Harry had been her lover lay quite on the surface of her sentimental fleeting smile. Her little affectations never varied. Errington caught himself wondering that he had ever been held even for a short week by her cheap charm.

"Poor Harry!" he said involuntarily.

Then her vanity was indeed hurt, and the hard flush in her sallow cheek was the flame of her new hatred for him.

"Harry is quite happy, quite satisfied," she said.

"I thought he was ill, just off to Italy."

"But it is in Italy I join him," she said defiantly.

"Oh! and does Sam approve of the little trip?" he asked cynically.

"I go every year to Italy," she replied. "You know I go every year." It was in Italy they had met.

"Poor Sam!"

She might be dangerous, but he could not help rubbing her up the wrong way. Perhaps a compliment or two would have secured her silence, a sign or touch of sentiment, a reminiscence of the past; but he could not bring himself to it.

"Poor Sam!" he said again, "so he still purchases his matrimonial felicity with that six weeks' holiday! And this year you are going to honour Harry Annesley with your company. Lucky fellow!"

"He does not know Italy. Italy is strange to him, and I, who know it so vell, vill make his stay pleasant."

He did not quite understand why she was so confidential. Also the manner in which she made her communication was somewhat defiant. It did not strike him then that she was playing a big game for a definite stake, and that she looked upon this surprising him with Lilian as a point, and an important one, in her favour.

As the conversation proceeded, however, and she went into details of her journey, he began to see that for some reason, or another, she feared his, or Berenice's interference. Errington wondered if Harry thought himself unique in the distinction of being her lover, and if it were this illusion in which she feared his being disturbed. But, in truth, there was more than this in her eagerness.

She had tried more than once to secure Berenice's sufferance. They had met for the second time at Harry's rooms after the hæmorrhage, after the consult-

ant's alarming report that the lungs were affected. Elsa had tried that Berenice should appreciate her solicitude, should take her into the charmed circle of her interest, and recognise that she too cared for Harry, wished to lighten his depression, assist in his nursing; but Berenice had ignored her consistently.

It had not suited Elsa to resent this openly. Harry was wrapped up in his sister. Her own influence over him was not so strong that she could risk it by speaking ill of her he held so dear. Elsa was an opportunist; in other words she was as ready to crawl as to stand upright. She crawled before Berenice, agreed to do everything she said, belauded and beslaved her; and still Berenice calmly ignored her existence. She bowed to her on entering, or leaving, the room, but she never sat down whilst the other was seated. She declined to speak of her to Harry.

"No, dear," she would say to him when they were alone, when, a little wistfully, he was for starting the subject, "I don't want to talk about her. If she is your friend I may not say what I think. We have so many other things to speak about."

Errington grasped quite soon that Elsa dreaded interference between her and Harry. But why should he interfere? Soon he was beginning to smile at Elsa's tactics, to pretend to hesitate in reassuring her, to utter moral platitudes.

But, by the time Lilian returned, ill at ease, and struggling to conceal it, with averted eyes, but bent on hospitality, it was fairly open between the two that Errington's "affair" with Lilian was to be kept a secret, as the price of his not interfering between Elsa and his brother-in-law.

It was the habit of the house for little Everard to come in at tea-time. The presence of visitors, the fracas in the morning, made no difference in the immutable nursery laws.

Lilian, busy pouring out tea, pressing hot cake and muffins upon her visitors, but always with those averted eyes, raised them to shoot one glance at Errington, when the boy jumped on to her lap, regardless of the danger from boiling water or buttered muffin, flung his arms about her neck, and told her he was "good now." Painfully she strained him to her, feeling the safety of his sweet love. She had no words for him, they were choked in her throat, but she kissed, and murmured over him, and the eyes raised that one moment over his head to meet Errington's, were full of a pathetic triumph.

"How you spoil zat boy," said Elsa easily from behind the refuge of her teacup. "It is so bad for boys to be made a fuss over; I sent both mine to school when zey were five."

"You would have sent Uncle Sam there too, if you could," Lilian retorted, holding her boy closer. Nothing could cure her of her impetuosity. No one must dare talk of rending Everard from her arms; she covered him with jealous kisses as she spoke.

But she was soon conscious that her words had been hasty. She had been rude to Aunt Elsa in her own house! Hospitality was another of the virtues innate, and racial, with her.

"You have so many other things to do, your music, your painting, your collections. I have only Everard," she added apologetically.

Errington laughed quietly to himself at the mention

of Elsa Beethoven's "collections." He was standing on the hearthrug, in his favourite position, his back to the fire, quite content now with the way things were going. But Elsa's Brummagem *Empire* furniture, her Italian pictures, her "old point" lace, the odds and ends of rubbish she spoke of as her "collections," appealed to his sense of humour.

"Mrs. Beethoven has no time for domestic joys," he said. "She is absorbed in the acquisition of art treasures," he interpolated, with that smile still in his eyes, lurking in the corners of his mouth. "Tell me what you have been buying lately. Have you picked up any more Titians, or Tintoretts, at five pounds a piece?"

She did not realise that he was laughing at her. Her vanity had always been sarcasm-proof on the subject of taste. She began volubly to descant on various recent purchases, appealing to him as if certain of his sympathy and approval, purposely exhibiting her contempt for Lilian's want of appreciation of the antique, purposely endeavouring to prove her old acquaintance with Errington, and their mutual tastes.

To him it was comedy, and, for a time, he replied in the same spirit; but the comedy soon palled. When he had led her into admitting that Rubens was greater as a draughtsman than as a colourist, and that a landscape she had picked up last year in Rome was probably his work although unsigned, that the blue in the sky was quite "distinctive," when she had, under skilful handling, admitted that Robert Adam was more "empirical" than the first Empire and the Ming period owed much to Thomas Chippendale, her accent and ignorance had already got on his nerves. He urged her with serious-

ness to devote her sojourn in Rome to the acquisition of Louis Seize bronzes, which he understood were now being unearthed at Pompeii, and then he had had enough of her.

"Come over here, Everard, come and talk to me. It's not fair to monopolise your mother. Now! look at that," he said, as the boy ran smilingly to him. "Stand upright and show your inches," he put his hands on the child's shoulders, turning him round, with his face to the light, to exhibit him to Elsa. "What do you think of that for a specimen of fine English work?" He laid a gentle hand on his curls, "How do you think Sir Joshua would have liked to paint it, or Romney? Would you like to be made into a picture, Everard, seated on your mother's lap, or kneeling by her?" He posed him quickly two or three different ways; discanting rapidly on composition, the old masters, Gainsborough, the modern men. He rumbled Everard's hair, and asked him if he wouldn't like to be an artist.

This was all for Lilian, she knew it. Her heart thrilled to him again. How he loved the boy, how kind and good he was to her!

"I'd rather be a soldier," said Everard. The lawyer released him with a laugh.

"There, I must be going," he said. Neither woman raised an objection.

"I wish you *bon voyage*," he said, as he shook hands with Elsa. "I hope your holiday will come up to your expectations," he added gracefully. His sense of humour was thoroughly to the fore over Elsa and her intrigues. He added a few light sentences.

But, when he said good-bye to Lilian, it appeared he had no words, light or otherwise, for her. He bent over

her hand, kissed it. Her embarrassment and hurried withdrawal, the eyes that could not meet his, her stained cheeks, were drawn attention to in that parting glance he threw to Elsa from the door. He gave her her freedom, it said; but let her note that he took his.

CHAPTER XVII

THERE followed a lull in the sequence of events. Harry had gone to San Remo, and Elsa had followed him, a fact of which Berenice was in ignorance. The trial of the Portland Place prisoners passed almost without press comment. The sentences had been severe, but nothing had transpired in the evidence implicating others than those who were in the dock. The week of the trial Kenny had taken his wife to the seaside. This had been Errington's advice. They were at the Metropole at Brighton, daily to be seen together on the parade, or driving along the front. Lilian acquiesced in whatever was proposed.

She had not seen the lawyer since the afternoon when Aunt Elsa's sudden entry, her surprise and wicked smile, had made it seem as if there were something wrong in his goodness to her. Her cheeks burned when she recalled Elsa Beethoven's smile; but the rest she put away. He was her friend, only her friend! She went through that time at Brighton quite well and bravely. There was a curious exhilaration and gladness at the back of her mind, she did not question its source. She put away Aunt Elsa's wicked smile, and the quick shame that followed it; there remained only the sense of an infinitely widened horizon, hazy and dim, but full of possibilities. Kenny benefited again, it was always Kenny who would benefit by Lilian's widening horizon.

Errington Welch-Kennard, so wise and great and

good, had dowered her with his friendship. She was glorified through it. She would never disappoint him, never, never. He had said she and her race were fine, brave, capable of sacrifice. Of course, she must show him how right he was.

To Kenny, during that week at Brighton, she was all and more than wife could be. She waited on him hand and foot. She was valet, groom of the chambers, and animated racing calendar. She calculated odds, added up his betting book, and, what she hated most of all, she wrote and asked her father for an advance of the income he allowed them, when Kenny lost more than he should have done at the Lewes Jumping Races.

There was no doubt Kenny liked her to be with him; he hated his own company. He liked her, too, to dress well, and talk gaily to his friends. She pandered to this desire of his. She was comparatively happy, or, at least, happiness hovered somewhere on her hazy horizon. It was Errington who had told her she must make Kenny a good wife. In a way, she liked those strange friends of Kenny's to make love to her, to tell her she was handsome. This seemed to make her more worthy of the friendship that lay in wait for her.

It was closely following on the trial that Balfour's retirement, and Campbell-Bannerman's declaration for Home Rule, absorbed the public attention. Errington's electoral campaign suddenly began to occupy him seriously. He enjoyed the prospect of a fight, being always in his element in opposition; and there was powerful opposition in the field against him. Berenice made herself his secretary and invaluable assistant. Her old experiences came to her help. If he rehearsed a few disjointed, brilliant sentences for a speech, over break-

fast or the dinner-table, in the midst of shaving or in the *entr'acte* of a play, he found they had been taken note of, and typewritten, and were on his desk, to aid his memory when he sat down to consider what points he should make at Groome or Hurstbridge. Letters asking for the assistance of their friends, for canvassers, or carriages, were despatched almost before he had time to decide whom he might approach.

He was in the thick of the fight, seeing people, elaborating his views, discussing and discovering his convictions on tariff, preferential duties, Chinese labour, alien immigration, before he realised into what he was being led; but he enjoyed it completely. He and Berenice were both wonderfully happy. She, because she was able to help him, because they were so much together, and their interests were mutual. He, because he was fighting, fully occupied, on the eve of success.

He remembered that afternoon at Eton Avenue at least as well as Lilian. He was not very definite with himself, but, in the background of his mind, there lurked the consciousness that something pleasant awaited him at the end of his work.

He had a note of encouragement from the Sphinx on the eve of the polling:

"DEAR ERRINGTON,—Go in and win. I am sure you will win, you deserve it, and I shall be so glad for you. Everything is going right just now. I long to hear the result. Wire it to me, for I believe I am rather pressed for time.—Ever yours, SYBIL."

He did not read this very carefully when it came, or the phrasing might have struck him. Hundreds of letters were pouring in, people surrounding him, tele-

grams, pressing appointments and interviews. The moment was critical, and the upshot anything but certain. The Liberal candidate was locally well known and popular, an employer of labour, and of incredible energy. Fortunately, he was an indifferent speaker, unready in repartee, and without Errington's gift of quick comprehension of the feeling of his audience. Errington could wax suddenly enthusiastic over a point of which he had never heard prior to some earnest individual getting up and questioning him upon it. He could sway and carry a meeting, substituting for knowledge, if he lacked it, anecdote and apt quotation. He was serious and earnest when it seemed necessary, but always he could make his audience laugh, turning the laugh with, or against, a heckler or an opponent with an epigram or allusion. His election agent grew daily more confident, Berenice's pride in him grew to fever heat.

But he had time to send off occasional bulletins.

"Everything going well; keep your mind quite easy. Your M.P. will visit you on the 7th," he wrote to the Sphinx.

The election was to be on the 6th.

Errington and his wife had their few hours of enforced inaction in the Committee room. The hurried breathless messenger found them there, also the quick confirmatory official report. Berenice restrained her inevitable outburst of emotion until his success was acclaimed by the cheering, swaying crowd, when, from the balcony, she filled her eyes, her ears, her brain, with the vociferous scene of her husband's triumph.

They drove to the hotel through the dark, hand in hand.

"So you are satisfied at last. You are content your

husband is to represent the eccentric and various views of the Hurstbridge electorate, you are proud to be an M.P.'s wife."

"I am proud to be your wife," she answered, below her breath. And he drew her close to him and laughed at her, but was, perhaps, rather proud of himself, and felt success bubbling through his veins like wine, exhilarating, making him young.

They returned to town the following morning, and found themselves overwhelmed again with congratulations, correspondence, a whole cohort of pressing duties.

It was in the midst of these Berenice received a letter from her brother, sent over by hand from the Albany. She did not know he had returned.

"May I come to you? I want to speak to you and your husband together. Ask him if he will see me; there is something I must tell him."

She handed the note to Errington; he tossed it back to her, laughing at her anxious face.

"Of course he can come. I haven't much time, but I'll give him ten minutes, and tell him the hatchet is buried. He wants to congratulate me personally, probably to promise us the reversion of his millions when I get into the Cabinet, when they give me that peerage which already you see looming at the end of my parliamentary career."

For, they had talked amazing triumphs in the glow of the victory; Berenice had seen an unending procession of honours to attend her husband's gift of eloquence. If he were so much wiser than she, and knew his limitations better, at least, he liked to listen to her prophecies.

But Harry's appearance, the very first sight of his

haggard face and miserable eyes, when he was ushered into the library, told the man of the world that it was not on congratulatory errand that he was bent.

He seemed to have forgotten the last time he and Errington met. He took the hand held out to him.

"It is very good of you to let me come."

"Not at all."

Errington pushed a chair towards him, and he sank into it. Berenice went softly behind it, she could not face him. For, the change these few weeks had made in Harry Annesley was not to be ignored nor overlooked. The once prominent eyes were sunk and glassy, there were hollows beneath his ears, and his neck had fallen away. But the dejection and spiritlessness of his attitude were more terrible to see. He looked like a man past hope.

"Poor devil," Errington thought, "booked for kingdom come, and can't face it."

But here the man of the world judged wrongly. Harry had no fear of death; that, already the grey shadow of it was as an impalpable presence about him, he had no knowledge.

The exertion of coming upstairs, of facing them, was as much as he was capable of at the moment. Berenice laid a gentle hand on his forehead, then her cheek against it. Her tears were overflowing, but she drew back again behind his chair, that he should not see them. He rested in the moment's silence.

"I am all right," he said.

"Of course," Errington answered him. Berenice was incapable of speech. "These stairs are devilish steep. Don't try to talk till you've got your breath back. I suppose you had a bad crossing, and that's enough to

knock anybody up." He rang the bell. "Bring Mr. Annesley half a glass of milk, with a wine glass full of old brandy in it, and hurry up," he told the man. "That's what you want. It's a fine pick-me-up, the finest in the world." He was talking against time, talking to give Berenice a chance of pulling herself together.

"I'm in awful trouble," Harry said at length. "I don't know what you'll say to me when you hear." He drank the milk thirstily. Even in the midst of his sympathy, Errington wished he had not gulped it down quite so noisily.

"Kennard—you never liked me."

"Oh! nonsense."

"And you were quite right. I'm a bad fellow. I shall bring nothing but disgrace upon you."

"Disgrace! Rubbish! You're ill, that's what's the matter, painting devils."

"No, no. It's true. You are a lawyer."

Errington whistled softly under his breath, beginning to think, and he always thought quickly.

"You know. . . ."

But how far he was going to reveal his trouble remained a mystery. James came in and announced that there was a lady below who wanted to see Mr. Annesley at once, most particularly. Harry Annesley started from his chair, beads of perspiration on his forehead, misery in his eyes, the brandy had given him strength.

"Berenice, you will see her, you will stand by her?"

"Who, dear, who?" she asked, bewildered. "Yes, yes, of course, anything," she answered quickly, to soothe him.

"We'll see you through, whatever it is," said Erring-

ton, soothingly too, but he began to have a shrewd suspicion. Elsa Beethoven did not wait for permission to enter, or even to be announced. She rushed into the room dramatically, she flung herself at Harry's feet, she was tearful, emotional, excitable, voluble.

"You vill help me—you vill save me—Sam knows everything—he turned me out of ze house—he says I must not see my children. You promised if harm came of it, if ve vas discovered, you would help me." The tears streamed down her face.

Errington was amazed, amused, the drama of it appealed to him for the moment. Unfortunately, he was called from the room at this most interesting moment, a deputation, somewhat mistimed, had to be met, and their congratulations submitted to.

"I'll see you presently; you can rely on me; it's all right," he managed to say to Harry. "Get rid of her; it will be all right," he said to Berenice, who went to the door with him. Then Elsa turned all her armoury and excitement to Berenice. Her eyes streamed with tears, and her volubility was almost incoherent.

"I love him so—your brozer, nothing in the world counted ven he was ill, and alone. I vent to him, of course I vent to him, I love him. I said, 'I stop viz you until you are better. If my husband get to know, vy zen—'" She grew more and more unrestrained, dramatic and gesticulatory. "'I do not care, I do not care vot 'appens.' And Harry says, 'I'll stick to you, votever 'appens, I stick to you.' And now he knows, Harry, he knows. Some one wrote him a letter. He ask me, 'Is zis true, is vot zere is in zis letter true?' I said, 'It is true; and I love him.' Zen he take me by ze wrist," she showed Harry her bruised wrists, "he call

me a foul name, a shockin' name, and say, 'Go—go—go out of my house.' I vent to you, you vere not in your rooms, zen I came on here, you von't send me away, you von't send me back to him."

"Get up, get up, Elsa!" She was kneeling before him. "Get up." He turned despairingly to Berenice.

"She came to me in Italy. What am I to do?"

Berenice's revolt, her horror at the situation, changed to pity at the appeal in his voice.

"Tell her I have loved you for years," cried Elsa, still on her knees.

"Poor Harry!" the words escaped Berenice. "Poor Harry!" His eyes were those of a hare caught in a trap, and her heart went out to him. "Shall we talk alone a little, Mrs. Beethoven and I?" Will you go away, and leave us?"

"That will be better," he said hastily. "It is hopeless to struggle," that was what his eyes said. "You will talk to each other. I'll go down to Errington."

"Yes, dear. Go, dear."

Perhaps she could do something, there must be something she could do!

"You vill help us, you vill be our friend," Elsa exclaimed excitedly, as the door closed behind Harry. She misunderstood the other. "Ah! it has been terrible, zo terrible for me. You do not know vot I suffer, vot I go through mit zat Sam. And for Harry, I do not mind. Mein children, my home, my name, it is nos-sing."

She went on talking wildly, picturing herself disgraced, turned out of her house, all through her love of Harry. She implored Berenice to be a friend to her. Rapidly she ran through her future. Sam would obtain

a divorce, Errington would help that there should be no delay, then she would be free.

At last, struck by Berenice's silence, by her cold aversion, the flow of her words lessened, hesitated, stopped.

"You, you are sorry for me?" she said.

"I think you are—horrible!" answered Berenice, completely candid.

Elsa gasped for breath, it was as a blow across her face.

"You sink, you sink . . .?" she gasped.

"That you are disgusting, horrible, shameless."

She made a last effort at conciliation.

"But I love him, I love him so." She subsided into a seat, she took out her handkerchief. But, through all her tears and sobs she could hear quite well, and soon her sobs ceased, and her anger began to rise.

"Your love, if it be true that you love him, is shameful. Why do you tell me of it? It makes me feel sick. You have a husband. Whatever he may be, he loves you, trusts you, has forgiven you unutterable things. Errington has told me so. You have children too! How could you contemplate leaving them for ever? If Mr. Beethoven did indeed apply for this divorce, of which you speak so easily, how about *them*? You are their mother. Oh!"

Berenice could not say all she felt, her horror and loathing of the woman seized her by the throat and choked her, when she remembered that children had been given to her, little loving children. And they counted for nothing with this creature! She would dower them with shame, and make the name of "Mother" synonymous with it. Berenice tried to say all this, and the other heard her, sullen and resentful.

"Go home," she cried, "Go home to your husband, go down on your knees to him. Beg him, pray him, to forgive you, for the sake of the love he once bore you, for the sake of his children and yours. Abase yourself before him, pray to him."

"That's right, that's the programme." Errington had returned. His eyes were full of laughter. "Sam will forgive you, I'll guarantee it."

"I am not going back to Sam. I do not want Sam's forgiveness," she said, and with a last attempt at drama she exclaimed, "It is for ever, I have left him for ever. Where is Harry? I am going to my Harry."

"What are you playing at?" Errington asked her quietly. "Out with it, Elsa. Let us hear your game."

At the alteration in his tone, the familiarity and confidence, Elsa looked up. Now the situation was changed. At a sign from him Berenice had left the room, and they were together alone. She dropped all her weapons, she knew of old how little use they were with him. She said, quite defiantly:

"Sam will divorce me. And I will marry Harry, so soon it is finished. You will not mind. I am not a greedy woman. His sister, she shall have what you like. And my settlements—you will see to that. We will not quarrel over that, you and I. I have said nothing, not a little word, about you and Lilian. It will be easy, easier for you; that she is my niece makes it explained. I will not, what you call, give you away."

She was eager in her horrible candour and proposition. She thought she knew him so well that her suggestion that she did not want all Harry's money, but only a proportion of it, her suggestion that his pursuit of, or *liaison* with, Lilian du Gore, would be made easy, or

furthered by this marriage which she contemplated, would appeal to his sense of fairness. She thought she was offering him the very *quid pro quo* for his services that would best secure them. She did not reckon with the influence a woman of Berenice's character has upon a man in daily communion with it. But in truth, at no time had Errington Welch-Kennard been a man to barter with, to threaten, or to move by consideration of personal interest. He laughed at the end of Elsa's speech, deliberately looked her in the face, and laughed at her.

"Go home," he said. It was the same observation his wife had made, although she had made it with a difference. "Go home, and don't make a fool of yourself," he added, quite cruelly, because he had no fear at all of her, and he wanted to finish the matter off quickly.

"You are much too old to go on playing at this sort of game. You've got a better chance than any other woman who has led your life. Sam is not much to look at, but the little brute really cares about you, and puts up with you. Why don't you turn over a new leaf, and make him a decent wife? He has had nearly twenty years of this kind of thing. Why, your daughters must be growing up, your sons out in the world. Do you want to kick them all down, force upon them what you are?"

In her rage she could not answer him, could not controvert his accusations, fly at his throat, or even tell him what she thought of him.

"Vot about you, vot about you and Lilian?" she managed to get out, viciously. "If I tell, if I tell your saint wife——"

“She wouldn’t listen to you. She wouldn’t believe a word you say. I have told her what a liar you are. Go home, I tell you. You are playing a stupid game. Annesley has just broken a blood vessel, that is why I sent his sister to him; he’ll be a dead man in six months, and where will you be then? Get hold of Sam, get reconciled with him, don’t make a fool of yourself!”

CHAPTER XVIII

ELSA was not to be got rid of so easily. She had set her heart on replacing Sam Beethoven by Harry Annesley; and she was a woman of resource, lacking personal dignity, totally without pride.

Berenice's fine qualities came out in these trying days. Harry was seriously ill, and his non-conformist conscience tortured him with doubts and misgivings. The Kennards would not let him return to the Albany, to be at the mercy of any move that Elsa might make. They kept him with them at Prince's Gate. This meant that they were bombarded with letters and telegrams. The woman began by sending him flowers and presents, by pouring out avowals of love for him, and reiterating the sacrifices she had made for him, and their consequences. There came eight-page letters, three-volume telegrams, and even post-cards. She walked up and down that enclosed terrace at Prince's Gate for hours, in the expectation of meeting him.

And he, in the throes of his mortal sickness, realising no danger but the danger he was in from her, cowered in his warm sitting-room, or on the couch in his bedroom, assuring his beloved sister that his cough was nothing, his illness was nothing, all that counted was his misery at the sin he had committed, his awful mental agony over what he should do to repair it. There were times when, had it not been for Errington's strong com-

mon sense, Berenice, in her pity, would have been prepared to yield a little in the position she had taken up.

"Errie, darling," she said once to her husband, "he makes me doubt if I am so right in keeping them apart. Although he hates and fears her so terribly and bitterly, he did promise to stand by her if it came out that they had been together. And she writes him that, although she is living in her husband's house, his persecution of her is awful. She says she cannot bear her life, that if, in three days, Harry will neither write nor see her, she will kill herself."

"No such luck, dear. Don't you believe it," he answered, continuing to tie his necktie quite deliberately, and to give his hair a final brush back. He had come out of his dressing-room at her call, and was finishing his toilette before her looking-glass. "She will live, live to be a curse to us, and to all her family. Don't you fear about Elsa Beethoven committing suicide. Murder is more in her line. Her persecution is shortening that poor fellow's life. I wish, with you, that I could put a stop to it. But not in the way you suggest. That would be a weakness which must end disastrously."

"But if her husband takes steps for a divorce?"

"He won't. He'll bluster and weep! But he won't part from her if he can help it. And she won't let him, if there is no hope from Annesley."

"But she says he has started proceedings."

"She was always a liar," he replied coolly, putting on his watch and seals.

"Oh! Errington, isn't it all dreadful!"

"Well! it is rather unpleasant; but we can't have all beer and skittles in this world, sweetheart. I won't have you breaking your heart over it." He did not wait

to put his coat on; he went over to her and kissed her. Berenice was still in bed. She had sat up with Harry until three o'clock, and Errington had insisted on her resting for a few hours. She loved to lie and watch him dressing.

"She is a real wrong 'un, I've known her for years. I could give Harry a synopsis of her career, if you think that would do him any good."

"Do you mean he is not—not the only man that she has ever—ever been bad with?" A lovely flush came to her cheeks. She even turned her face away from her husband, towards the wall, when she put that question to him. She was ignorant of evil, and hated the knowledge of it that was being thrust upon her. But Harry was so ill, and his agony of mind was so desperate to watch, she would ask anything that might help him.

"I do mean that. I mean that she had had many lovers; I have the best possible reason for knowing it," he added drily. "Don't blush, don't hide your face. Didn't you know you were not marrying a saint?"

It was not likely, after that, that Berenice's feelings towards Elsa were any kinder. She asked Errington to have a talk with Harry, to try to ease him. Errington gave up an hour of his very busy day to this purpose; missing his breakfast for it, in fact.

"My dear fellow," he said, "my wife tells me you are worrying yourself to death because you think you have some duty towards this woman, some unfulfilled duty."

Harry turned his tortured eyes towards his brother-in-law. The room was close, and the atmosphere fevered. Harry, with those sunken eyes, and prominent cheek bones, a red spot on each of them, breathed

heavily and with difficulty. His wasted hands were dry and hot. But it was his mind, only his mind, that could not rest. He said:

"I want to do right. I did promise to stand by her if it came out that she had been with me in Italy."

"But it didn't come out! She confessed; that makes all the difference. As for the anonymous letter that she pretends drove her to this confession, she wrote it herself. You may bet your bottom dollar on that; she was always tricky."

"And do you really think I have no duty to her, no responsibility? I can't sleep for doubting. Tell me what you think."

"I really think that the only duty a man has to a woman of light character is a pecuniary one. Now, will you empower me to settle with her on those lines?"

"But is she light? Are you sure? Ten years ago, she had the most innocent, beautiful nature. You know she was—she was with me a few days at Galatz. It was I who first led her astray. Oh! God! The hell I live in through it. Night and day I can't get it out of my mind. I break into cold sweats when I think of it, and it catches my breath. I suffer so——"

One could see that he did not exaggerate his sufferings. He could not disentangle his physical from his moral agonies.

"Suppose it is true that she has grown into what she is, through me, through that week! Sam fetched her back then. She went for the sake of her children, I could not bring myself to persuade her to stay. She has had years of persecution at his hands, through me, through that week. And she has loved me all through——"

"She went with Sam because she had had enough of you, and found Galatz deadly dull." He answered, purposely brutal.

"Be a man, Annesley, pull yourself together. She told me the incident, herself, years ago, but I did not connect it with you. She said the place was insufferable. She cared no more for you then than she does now. It's variety she wants, sensation, excitement, anything but dull respectability. I tell you, you have no responsibility in the matter. The woman was bad, I verily believe, from the time she was ten years old. It's all lies that she has told you. As for fidelity to you, or to any one for that matter, it's an impossibility to her. Gratitude and fidelity are two words she has never learnt. I got up her history once, she gave me a lot of trouble, and I sifted it through. Don't you know where, and when, Sam Beethoven met her? She got into trouble when she was seventeen, and her people, Viennese *bourgeois*, very respectable and sedate, turned her out of door. They settled a sum of money upon her, 'her portion,' they called it, but they wouldn't have anything to do with her. She got round Sam with a pitiful story of early widowhood. He married her when her baby was six weeks old, and brought them both over to England. She hadn't been with him a year before there was a young fellow living in the house with them under the pretence of altering the dining-room, decorating it in Viennese fashion! They scandalised Hampstead for months before Sam understood what was going on, and realised that he was the laughing-stock of the place. Of course, there was a row, but he forgave her, he isn't a man of fine feeling, and he literally can't live without her, he thinks her wonderful.

He has mad fits of jealousy, when, I believe, he does knock her about and lock her up in her room, and make the most extraordinary scenes. But it always ends by his imploring her to forgive his unkindness, to care for him again. Her next notorious adventure was with a music-master. She took daily piano lessons, she has as much soul as a cow, rather less, I think! But she raved of Wagner, and haunted her musician's rooms, until he bolted to Switzerland to get rid of her."

"Oh, don't, don't," cried Harry faintly. For, after all, once, not such a long time ago, she had represented his ideal of womanhood. He turned his face away, and Errington waited.

"Well! is it enough? Have I told you enough to persuade you that you must absolutely not give her any encouragement. She wants to force Sam into taking proceedings."

It was difficult for them to secure peace for Harry. They established two nurses in his sick-room, and kept back all letters and telegrams. Then Elsa made Errington her objective. He could hardly move out of the house without being waylaid. Her point was, that she must see Harry, that it was her right to see Harry; she accused Errington of the meanest motives in wishing to keep them apart. She picketed the house, threatening to create a scandal, actually creating a scandal in the kitchen and servant's hall. It is only justice to Elsa to say that she did not believe Harry was really ill, she thought it was a manoeuvre to prevent her re-establishing, or keeping, her influence over him.

Parliament had re-assembled, Errington had taken his seat, his friends were already anticipating his maiden speech. Social engagements crowded upon him.

Elsa Beethoven was a nuisance. but she seemed an unimportant one. Usually, when she tried to stop him on his going out or on his coming in, he merely, "ppshd" her out of the way as if she had been an intrusive cat. He had no use for her, and he had also no fear of her. Harry was well looked after just now, he knew; and that was the important point.

One day she forced her way into his office; for Elsa was past reason now. She had pictured herself free from that hateful Sam Beethoven, married after a decent interval to Harry Annesley, accepted by the Welch-Kennard's. She could not, and would not, abandon her hope. Her cleverness was only surface-cleverness; she thought she had only to persist to win. But, as time went on and her cause made no progress, she had begun to doubt. She had never counted on Errington defying, Berenice ignoring, Harry being kept from, her. His weakness she could correctly gauge, but she could not work on it if she were prevented seeing him. Baulked in all her endeavours, like an animal at bay, wild-eyed and maddened, she could think now only of revenge. And Errington, strong in his position, and having the pride of his strength was so contemptuous and cool, so absolutely indifferent to her threats and fury, that he acted upon her as the proverbial red rag.

"My good woman," he told her, "you are making a perfect ass of yourself, as well as a nuisance. My wife puts your letters into the fire without reading them, and those you send to Annesley are left unopened. I hear Sam is going about the Stock Exchange and the Piccadilly Club, tearing his hair and talking of his grievances, which isn't very dignified, and also leads nowhere."

"You vill see, vot you vill see. You lie and intrigue, and get round your vife. But I have not yet told Manny Henry vat you do mit Lilian, mit my niece. You vill not get round Manny Henry, he vill kill you ven he knows. I vill tell him, and Kenny. I vill tell Kenny vy you sent him away. Oh! I know vy you sent him out of ze country, and pretend he is in danger. I vill tell vot I see, vot I sink."

"Oh! go and tell the marines, tell anybody anything. Only get out of my office, and keep away from Prince's Gate, or I shall give you into custody. Mind, that is not an idle threat; I've had about enough of this."

He did not give her any grace or quarter. Although she stood and vituperated him, her accent growing with her excitement, hysteria taking the place of reason, he rang the bell and ordered that she be removed, and told the clerk quite coolly, before her face, that, if she did not go quietly, they were to send for a policeman. Whatever else may be said of him, at least he was no coward.

It was only at the end of a violent scene, after she had gone, escorted by three amused clerks, but without the intervention of the threatened policeman, that he began to consider seriously the possibility of her annoying Lilian. The past weeks had been so crowded that he had not found time to go up to Eton Avenue. He had not forgotten Lilian, he had sent flowers, toys for the boy, little notes, only he had not been able to get there.

One of these little notes, by the way, had led to a scene between Lilian and her husband. This was it:

"DEAR CHILD.—Forgive me not coming to you for the next day or two. It is not that you are not in my

thoughts, indeed I have not forgotten you. Tell Everard he shall have a complete battalion of guardsmen to play with as soon as I am free. My regards to Kenny. Yours, E. W.-K."

The orchids that accompanied it were already in water.

Kenny surprised her reading this unremarkable epistle for quite the tenth time.

"What have you got there, a letter from Kennard? What does he say?"

Then her quick flush, and the tightening of her hold on the letter, struck him. "Anything in it?" he asked, and the colour retreated a little from his face, "about me?" The trial was over, but a remnant of anxiety lingered.

"No, there is nothing about you," she said shortly. She was no mistress of intrigue; she did not want Kenny to see her letter, but could not have explained why. She was always trying to be a good wife to him, but always he defeated her intentions.

"I don't believe it. Let me see it." He held out his hand for the letter.

"I won't let you see it. Leave me alone." Her temper again got the better of her prudence. The struggle between them was very short. He was slow, unready, no match for her young agility. The letter was in the fire, it caught quickly, and had shrivelled to black ash, before he had recovered from his surprise at being set at defiance by her. His own temper was even, quite different from hers.

"Oh! so that's it, is it?" he said recovering himself, regaining his normal attitude of coolness. He laughed.

"He has got you too; I never knew such a fellow. You are all alike, you women. It's a lucky thing I don't mind. If I'd known it was a love-letter, I shouldn't have asked to see it; but I thought there was something in it about the case."

"It wasn't a love-letter." The flame in her cheeks was scarlet, indignation made havoc with her resolutions, her voice was raised:

"I don't have love-letters, you know I don't. I'm a married woman. Married women don't have love-letters, it's disgraceful to accuse me——"

"I wish you would not raise your voice. I've told you a dozen times what bad form it is to scream when you lose your temper, like a hippopotamus when it takes the air, or an Irish M.P."

"I don't care what you've told me; I don't care what you say. You are a beast. You ought to beg my pardon."

"Or to use bad language?"

As she lost her temper he grew even cooler. He could plant each shaft deliberately, infuriating her whilst he laughed that soft flabby laugh of his. He subsided luxuriously into his easy-chair, whilst she still raged in front of him.

"How dare you say I have love-letters? You know it's a lie. I'm not like the women you know."

"Quite true. I always avoid the lower orders."

"And Mr. Kennard wouldn't write them."

He laughed outright at that.

"Oh! that's a good idea. Kennard! Why Kennard's a notorious lady killer. You ought to feel very proud."

"You—you beast!"

"Oh! you tire me; run away and play. Here, though, stay. Get me a whiskey first, and," for she had turned to go, she could face neither his jeers nor his laughter in her present mood, "don't think I am annoyed. I'm really very flattered, he has always had taste, that fellow." But she was out of the room.

She had been extraordinarily proud that the lawyer had telegraphed the result of his election to her. Of course, she knew it before the wire arrived, but still it was to her he had sent it.

Now she was bitterly ashamed of her loss of temper with Kenny over the note she had burnt. She tried to make it up with him. It was always difficult to make things up with Kenny, for his was not a generous nature. But there was no doubt that, in his own way, he was beginning to appreciate Lilian. If it were true that Kennard was attracted by her, wrote her love-letters, well, that was a feather in his, Kenny's, cap. So he regarded it. There are men with this point of view. When Kenny chaffed his wife about the lawyer's attentions, it was a sign of good humour on his part. He rallied her about the toys that Everard received, and the other notes that came, and the flowers. He never again asked for them to be shown to him.

Errington Welch-Kennard thrust all engagements on one side, after the stormy interview with Elsa Beethoven, and went to Eton Avenue. At least, the girl must be prepared for eventualities; she must not, without warning, be exposed to her Aunt Elsa's violence of hatred and unreason.

A trivial, an almost absurd, *contre-temps*, prevented that warning being given.

This apparently trivial thing that kept Errington

from warning Lilian of possible trouble from Elsa Beethoven was, primarily, that little Everard had signalled the return from Brighton by falling ill with influenza. It was very annoying; Kenny had not much sympathy with illness, but a very genuine nervous dread of anything happening to himself. Lilian pandered to that, too, took his temperature morning and evening, fed him with supplementary meals of beef-tea, and egg beaten up with milk and brandy, and followed him into the hall, when he was going out, with great coat and muffler. It was strange how her sense of duty toward him grew with her service to him. It seemed like a dream, an impossible nightmare, that, for the boy's sake, for any preposterous reason, she had ever contemplated deserting her post.

The first spring meeting at Hurst Park synchronised with this episode.

"I suppose you're not going to pose that you can't come to the meeting because the boy's had a cold?" Kenny began, the morning of the race.

Lilian hesitated; she had been hesitating since yesterday. It was true there was no longer any anxiety about the boy. The illness had left him, his temperature was subnormal, there were no complications, but he was very fractious and trying, and nurse was not the most patient, nor the most tactful, of attendants. Lilian hated the prospect of being six or eight hours from the sick-room. Everard might insist on getting up, he might easily contract a fresh chill, he might refuse to eat, or demand more food than was good for him; and he would be so dull without her to play dominoes with him, or help to put up his fortress, or read him to sleep! But she was not sure she ought to let Kenny go without

her. He always betted more recklessly, less intelligently, when she was not with him. She was torn between her two duties.

She had a headache herself this morning. That did not prevent her discussing the merits of the various horses with Kenny over breakfast. Ruff's guide was exhaustively ransacked for the performances of one "Jetley."

"You might work the thing out for me on paper," he said, and, whilst he was reading the *Sporting Life*, she made him a clever differential chart, showing how Jetley had compared at various times with the other animals he would have to meet, his weights, and record. Both her logic and her mathematics came in useful. All her talents and acquirements were now made subordinate to Kenny's pursuits.

Yet she was glad to get rid of him this morning. That he slammed both the door of the dining-room and the street door, although she had a headache, and had told him so, did not detract from her gratitude that he had finally agreed to go by himself.

She sat with Everard all that morning. He was irritable and fractious, nurse out of temper, and everything difficult and trying.

By the afternoon, she gave up fighting her headache and general depression, and lay down on the drawing-room sofa, aching all over, feeling fairly sure that she was in for the same epidemic that had attacked her boy.

Finding her like this, depressed and inclined to be tearful, how could Errington Welch-Kennard, when he drove up that afternoon, worry her further with talk of Elsa, or the possibilities her state of mind portended?

Instead, he rang for tea, and fed her with it, petted, and cheered her, sitting quite a long time in the gloaming with her hand in his, talking of friendship. She was passionately grateful for his gentleness, the affection he showed her. He had no fear of illness or infection. He even went upstairs to see the boy, in order that she should not be disturbed or worried by imagining him worse than he was. He brought down a glowing account of restored good temper, and a fine game of soldiers that was going on, nurse acting "sentry go" with the greatest amiability, and the bed strewn with tin corpses.

He stayed with her over two hours. They were alone in the drawing-room all that time, except for the few minutes he had run up to the nursery. The lights were not turned up, because Lilian's head still ached, and the darkness was his prescription. He talked a good deal of sentiment, understood quite well that she was enwrapped in false security, mistaking, misapprehending, ignorant of the game he was teaching her. He liked to see her colour rise and fall—even in the fire-light he could see that; and her breath came quickly, at a quotation punctuated with a sigh, or the sigh alone. She always pictured him with a wife who did not understand him, ill-mated. Because he never mentioned his wife to her, this was what she imagined.

He liked her ignorant defence, or shyness, when he adjusted a cushion for her head, lingering over the adjustment, when he drew her dress down over her feet, and said, "what slender ankles!" as he stooped and patted them. He would not let her get up at all. He sent for a rug, and tucked it round her. The tucking that rug round her was a masterpiece of ingenious

caress. Always it was slipping away, or needed readjustment. All through that afternoon the process went on. He assured her that she had not the influenza at all, she was only low, out of sorts, wanting care. He gave her a foretaste of what his care might mean. Kenny was so careless, so wrapped in self, and the blood in her veins was warm. She was so young too. How could she resist his growing intimacy? She was shy, modest, pure, but her spirit leaped to him, and presently she was watching him, dumbly eager for his touch, like a dog for a bone.

"Have I done you good?" he asked. "No, don't get up. I am going to make you quite comfortable before I leave. But I want to know if I have done you any good, if I, my friendship, made you happier."

He had risen to go, but he bent over her as he questioned her. The eyes she raised to him in her dumb gratitude were glorious, her small pouting scarlet lips were hot. He told her so, when he bent to touch them with his.

She had had no defence against that sensuous petting, except the instinctive defence of her shyness. It was the moment before he left that he stooped to kiss her lips, they *were* hot, responsive, too. It was then, as if by an uncontrollable impulse, he had knelt suddenly by her side, taken her a moment in his arms, feeling her fevered slenderness shrink, then almost yield.

"Dear, dear child," he murmured. "Don't you know I care for you?" His arms, his lips, the gleam in his half shut eyes, assured her of it.

And then he was gone.

She was alone now, but somewhere in her beating heart, and hammering pulses, she knew, she knew,

through all the throbbing pain in her head, the exquisite fear, that it was to his forbearance, and not her resistance, she owed it, that it was only fear.

She had said it was "easy to be good"; but it wasn't easy, and she did not want to be good. Yes, she did, she did. She fell into wild weeping and reaction, before another hour had passed, hating him and herself.

He guessed rightly enough how it would be with her. In the measure, the same reaction came to him. He called himself names all the way home, and to Berenice, that evening, he was kindness itself. The film of her delicate reserve melted, and she told him what he had brought into her life, how he filled it. He got back to self-satisfaction and content. After all, he had only tested his powers, and proved them unabated. The girl was lonely, Kenny must look after her more, she was singularly attractive and she had temperament, certainly she had temperament. She was too much alone. He had no definite intention of carrying the matter any further.

Circumstances, however, decided that for him, bitter irresistible circumstances.

Elsa Beethoven had watched him go in. She watched him go out. She knew there had been no light in the drawing-room. Her hatred of him would triumph, must triumph. She had only to think now how to make that triumph complete.

CHAPTER XIX

KENNY forgot to miss Lilian going down in the train. He met many congenial spirits, and together they checked the sporting papers, discussed jockeys, and abused trainers.

The train puffed into the little station of Hurst Park. The stream of people, all intent upon the one goal, flowed along the narrow pathway that led from the platform to the club house. On all sides one heard irresponsible racing chatter. The names of favourites and outsiders were freely bandied about among the gaily dressed ladies. Men with impenetrable faces were being pressed for the information they either had not, or would not give. It was a brilliantly sunny day, the King was expected, and the crowd grew momentarily larger.

Kenny knew his way to the paddock, and the man at the gate gave him a tip. It was the habit of this janitor to give various tips to amateur racing men. One of the horses was bound to win, and the backer would rarely forget to reward the genius who had suggested it to him.

In the paddock little groups stood about, some were merely frivolous, whilst others were serious and intent on the matter in hand, arguing, as if in committee, the respective merits of their fancies, full of mysterious secrets they had acquired from hangers-on of jockey, trainer, or bookmaker. Simple credulity stood cheek

by jowl with simple dishonesty; stupidity and craft discussed, as if on equal terms, the odds and the causes that governed them. There is a *bonhomie*, a *camaraderie*, about the frequenters of a race-meeting that obtains only in gambling centres. Kenny met many friends, and he aired his views, talking authoritatively. He had made up his mind, before the numbers went up for the first race, that he had spotted a certainty. There was no Lilian to hold him in check.

When he left the paddock he had the look of a man of affairs. Before he hurried through the enclosure, and arrived at the ring, he had decided it would be absurd to put only a pound or two on "Leviathan" at six to one. He had borrowed a "tenner" from Lilian before he started. If he put his "tenner" on that horse he would have sixty in hand for the big race. He would go home with something really worth having. He argued the matter with himself as if indeed there could be no doubt as to the result. Finally, he put the ten-pound note on his selection. He felt he had got a bargain, for now the odds were eights, and the heads were backing "Tisley." Then he mounted the steps of Tattersall's, and, glass in hand, began to watch the race. There were several false starts, there was a very excellent race, and the "dead certainty" was beaten only by a head.

It was a misfortune, it was a thousand pities; but, after all, the very nearness of it proved to Kenny what a fine judge he was of form!

All through that disastrous day he kept his opinion. He strengthened it with innumerable whiskeys and sodas, and though his "rotten luck" pursued him, he retained it to the end. Once a jockey was thrown, once

he could have sworn the horse was pulled. He had lost Lil's "tenner," that represented her weekly household money, and he was in debt to the tune of eighty pounds. He was very depressed at the end. "Jetley" romped in just as he had expected for the "Hurst Park Hurdle." But, at the very last moment, he had decided it wasn't good enough to back the favourite at evens, when "Orison," the best outsider in the race, was to be done at tens. The "best outsider in the race" brought up a dilatory rear!

Going home was dreary work. Kenny went over his betting book, and thought what a "near thing" it had been more than once. The "beastly" day, too, turned dull and grey towards the afternoon. By the time he reached London it was drizzling with rain. When he got to Eton Avenue there was a steady downpour, and his temper was as sodden as the weather.

It was "disgusting" to find the house in darkness. It was "beastly" Lilian should be "sprawling" on the sofa in the drawing-room, turning the room into a "damned infirmary." If she was ill, why didn't she go to bed, and send for a doctor, and not infect the whole place? He turned on all the lights at once, waking her with a sudden shock from fevered dreams in which she was loosed from all the moorings of her lifetime, now engulfed and drowning in black waters, now groping terrified in utter blackness, for the touch of a human hand, always in desolation. She took a few moments to recover her bearings when she was so suddenly awakened. She was throbbing all over with the pains and fears of her dreams. Kenny's was the hand for which she had been grasping. In a flash she knew

that. She welcomed it, she welcomed him, trying to smile, to say something nice to him; she was humble, deprecatory.

"I don't really think it is influenza, Kenny, only my head ached so fearfully. I don't think it is infectious. I am sorry I lay down here. Don't—don't be unkind to me."

She burst into tears. It wasn't often she broke out in that particular way. If he had not had such an awful day, if he had not been wet, and tired, and not quite sober, it is possible he might have been gentler; for it was easy to see that she was ill.

But, as it was, he told her not to make a fool of herself.

He hated scenes. He turned the place upside down, ringing incessantly until Jane rushed up "thinking the house was on fire," as she said. She was flurried and rude. But the street door bell was ringing at the same time, and the nursery was calling for milk, and altogether Kenny's home-coming made quite a little domestic tornado. And Lilian was quite helpless, she could only lie on the sofa and go on crying, saying she couldn't help it, begging him to forgive her, making him even wilder because he knew how badly he was behaving and resented the effects.

The ring at the street door signalled the arrival of a cab, with a note. The Sphinx wanted to see Kenny at once. She knew he was probably just home from the races. He wasn't to wait to change, he was to come to her *at once*.

"Now what on earth can she want in such a hurry?" he asked Lilian; and, of course, Lilian could not

imagine. She was really past imagining, or even responding. She was actually in the grip of a sudden and sharp attack of influenza.

When, grumbling and curious, but not without having changed his boots and his clothes, and generally taken care of himself, Kenny took the same cab that had brought the note, and went off at the Sphinx's command, Lilian stumbled up to bed, with the aid of the banister, and Jane's arm. And, once in bed, it was obvious, even to Jane's limited intelligence, that it was a case for a doctor. For, that pain in her temples made Lilian light-headed. She was talking, and there was not much sense in what she said. She seemed alarmingly feverish too, and nurse, whose advice was sought for, thought Dr. Lewis ought to be summoned.

Fortunately, or, perhaps, as events turned out, we should say, unfortunately, Dr. Lewis was at home, and came over at once. He took a prompt, very definite, view of the case. Medical men have unique opportunities for realising domestic situations; this one was nothing new to him.

"She has a sharp attack of influenza," he told nurse, "probably she has been fighting against it to avoid alarming her husband. She must be kept absolutely quiet. I'm going to prescribe something for the fever, and I'm going to give her a sleeping draught. Now, will one of you sit up till Mr. du Gore comes home, and tell him she is on no account to be disturbed? He must sleep in the dressing-room."

"There is no saying what time Mr. du Gore comes home," grumbled nurse, "and I can't leave my boy alone on the upstairs floor."

"I'm not going to sit up all night for nobody. There's

quite enough work in this house without that," objected Jane.

Lilian heard them discussing it. The prospect of going to sleep, of getting rid of that pain in her head, of being left alone, roused her wandering wits.

"Pin a note on the door saying no one is to come near me," she suggested, with her eyes closed. "He won't come in if you say—" But she grew a little confused when she tried to say that Kenny would not come near her if he thought she had anything infectious.

The note that was pinned on the door merely said that she was "not to be disturbed."

It had not been contemplated that, when the sleeping draught and the medicine arrived, she would be left to administer both to herself. Yet, Jane brought them up, and flounced off again, and not having recovered her temper after Kenny's bell-ringing. It was some time later in the long hot evening when Lilian got out of bed and locked her door, and gave herself the draught. "I shall be all right in the morning," was her last conscious thought. "If I lock the door, I shall be left quiet."

What had induced Elsa Beethoven to go to the Sphinx with her story is difficult of explanation. But Prince's Gate was unassailable, Manny Henry away from home, Kenny at the races.

Sybil Heseltine received her, listened to her. Sybil had been out of pain for some days now, but all her faculties were failing.

She knew nothing about Harry Annesley and Elsa Beethoven. She had seen no one but Errington for a week past, and he could not doubt how it was with her. He had told her nothing but of the successful election,

and the amusing letters he was receiving from his constituents, of his increasing practice, everything that he thought might please her. He brought her a bunch of lilies, or a basket of forced strawberries, a few grapes, some early peas, but now he brought her no longer his troubles or vexations. He stayed only five minutes; for five minutes he could keep up that tone of light banter, could tell her of this or the other success, achieved or promised. He knew all about her state, he put it away from him as much as he could, but he knew the end of their long strange intimacy was at hand. Why should he talk to her of his wife's brother, or the trouble Elsa Beethoven was giving them, or anything that might hurt her in her dying?

But Elsa had no such compunction. She sent in word that she wanted to see Mrs. Heseltine urgently; and the message eluded the nurse's vigilance. Sybil could not conceive why Elsa should come now; but carried to the sofa in her drawing-room, dressed up for visitors, yet without visitors, for so the orders had gone forth, she accepted Elsa Beethoven as a welcome intruder. And Elsa had no bowels of compassion to be moved by the spectacle.

The dying Sphinx, in a wonderful kimono of blue flowered *crêpe de chine*, embroidered with peacocks in marvellous plumage, lay back on the pillow of old rose-colour brocade. There was nothing alive of her but her brilliant eyes, those eyes set like jewels in her head. She was quite immobile, even her breath seemed paralysed, as it slowly rose and fell, only the wonderful eyes in the shrunk face glowed with life.

Elsa began to pour out her tale all in a breath. Since Mrs. Heseltine was a friend of Errington Welch-Ken-

nard, Elsa thought perhaps she would like to know what he was doing, what a villain he had turned out, what a *vaurien*.

At the very first word, at the very first knowledge that it was of Errington the woman came to speak, the Sphinx revived. It was an electric shock to her failing powers. Her brain woke up, and she listened as if that last dose of morphia had been only water. She was eager to know, to hear and understand, the story that was being poured forth so rapidly, so incoherently, yet with such obvious spite.

Why had Elsa come to her? But how glad, how glad she was that she had come. The story was true or not true, it sounded possible. Errington had been married nearly six years, and it sounded possible. But no mischief must come of it. His wife must not hear, his career must not suffer. This woman must be muzzled, stopped—how? *How?* Behind those brilliant eyes the dying brain struggled for a solution.

“The last time I vent zere, zey vas in the dark, and he vas holding her, kissing her. He has no shame, no respect. To-day, vile Kenny vos at ze races he stay until it vas six. Zey had no light, zey vas togezzer on ze sofa in ze drawing-room. I saw zem zrough the vindow. I tell you because you like him, you believe in him. His wife, she believe nossing, Ach! I vill make her believe.”

That was an admission, one the Sphinx seized upon, that rid her quickly of one crying anxiety.

“His wife knows nothing?” she interpolated quickly, “nor Kenny?”

“But Kenny shall know, and Manny. Manny Henry vill kill him. But I make Kenny divorce her. I force him to it. Ah! zere shall be von scandal zere.”

Sybil wanted to know what motive was at work, but she felt her power slipping, slipping away from her. She had done so much harm, she must do a little good. She knew her influence had been evil, always evil. It would be good to draw the poison from this woman's fangs. There should be no scandal. Errington must be saved. She must, she *would*, save him. How she hung on to her failing strength! She had thought she could have died quietly when the Portland Place trial was over, when Kenny had been saved from what she had brought upon him. And, indeed, since then everything had been easier, the daily pain was daily less. And now again she could not die, she dared not. It was very hard, she was so tired. But the daylight was bright now at the end of the tunnel, ever since the Portland Place trial she had seen the light shining. It was a light that lay softly on a green churchyard, white with tombs, shaded with trees. Ah! there she could rest, but not yet—not yet.

Elsa's story told, she was got rid of tactfully, skilfully. She was to come again to-morrow. She was to do nothing hurriedly.

Kenny was then quickly summoned. Neither nurses nor doctors could stop Sybil in her desires when she was as alive as this. And, indeed, they hardly tried, the end was so near, nothing mattered.

She was such a strange Sphinx. The cab had hardly gone for Kenny before another was despatched to the nearest florist, for flowers, masses of flowers.

"Group them about me," she said, "put the pink roses in that jade bowl, the white lilac in the crystal vase, the lilies where they always are, by the Rossetti. Don't let the place look like a sick-room, make it gay.

Spray me with attar of roses, open the window a little!"

They obeyed all her instructions; she was a little impatient, perhaps, but wonderfully clear. Soon the room was as if prepared for a reception, as Kenny had seen it a dozen times before. He knew no difference, saw no difference, in his hostess.

"Dear Kenny, how good of you to come," she began. "I daresay you were tired too. I hope you've had a good day, and all the right horses have won. Or have you been losing? I do hope you've not been losing."

He laughed; he, too, was always at his best here. His troubles seemed to fall from him when the Sphinx questioned him about them.

"No! I can't say the right horses have been winning; if you mean, by the right horses, those I have backed. I've had a very bad day. But, of course, I came to you when you wanted me."

"Dear Kenny," she said again, "I had to tell you something. I wanted to tell you something." She put forth all her strength. She could not bear a scene, or any pathos, from Kenny. She must treat it lightly. "I'm going to die," she said smiling.

He was startled, he moved away from her, shrank from her quickly; it was his instinct. Then he recovered himself.

"Oh, some day, of course, some day. So are we all, for that matter. What's the good of talking about it? You've always been ill, you're not worse, you don't look any worse."

The red-shaded lights were doing their work; she was glad of that.

"No, no worse, better rather; but one never knows.

I'm tired of this grey old world. I'd rather like to see if I can help the Psychical Research people. Never mind about that. You know I have a little money, not much, my luxuries came from Kennard. . . ."

She looked about her, she could not sigh, but all the porcelain and bindings, all the pictures and bronzes, all the fine stuffs and draperies, were tokens from him, and her heart was so full of him.

"But what I have,—it is something like £25,000, and it brings in about £1,000 a year,—I've left in trust, for you, you and that boy of yours."

"To me?" the red flush came slowly into his face. "To me! what for?"

What for? How could she tell him? From boyhood she had destined him for ruin, planning this revenge on Algernon's god-father. For Sir Algernon du Gore had sided with those who had hounded Algernon down, had stood by the side of the man who had denounced him, had openly said that, as a father himself, he applauded the action. And it was as a father she had made him suffer. For, after Algernon had been spat upon and tortured, there was no mercy in her. But now she was sorry, she was desperately sorry. She had made her will when he had been forced to leave the Army, when he was at his lowest, ruined, and disgraced.

"Oh! your father was my husband's god-father." She could be paradoxical, why should she alter because she was in sight of that green rest of hers? "I owed it to you in a way. But now—I want you to promise me something."

"Of course." The slow flush had not yet faded.

What did the £80 he owed at Hurst Park matter? There was a lot of spending in £25,000. It was awfully

good of her to leave it to him. Of course, if she said she was dying, she was probably right. Now he came to look at her, she did seem awfully ill. "Of course I'll do anything you want me," he said awkwardly.

"Will you? Will you promise me faithfully," she asked eagerly. "Even if it is difficult?"

"You are not likely to ask me anything I can't do," he said slowly, rather heavily. He was unused to dramatic situations, he was awkward and ill at ease. He wanted to go. It was awfully good of her to leave him that money, though, perhaps, as her husband was his father's godson, he had some claim to it; but he wished he might go. It was very hard on her having to die, and all that, but he wished himself out of the room.

"Come over to me, I can't talk to you while you stand about, looking so distressed. Sit down here."

He took, at her bidding, the low chair by the sofa, Errington's chair.

"You know your wife is very beautiful,—out of the way beautiful!"

What on earth had his wife got to do with it? But a little twinge of compunction seized him. She had asked him to be kind to her, he had not been very kind. She had been ill, too, devilish seedy. He did have a twinge of compunction because he had not been kind. And she had cried, she very seldom cried like that.

"She is very well in her way," he said. "She is not at all a bad sort; there are a lot worse than she is."

"And a man cannot have a young and beautiful wife without other fellows envying him."

A slow smile lit up his face.

"I suppose not," he said. "But Lil knows her way

about. She is not that sort," he added, responding to what the Sphinx had not said.

"I know how straight she is. *I* know, dear boy. But every one does not know, that is the point; it is a stupid world, such a stupid, censorious, blear-eyed world."

"You haven't heard anything?" he asked, surprised, a little annoyed, hardly yet roused.

"Yes, I have!" She was going to be quite straightforward with him. She was going to take all the poison from that woman's fangs. "Her aunt, Elsa Beethoven, you know her, has got hold of some story about your wife and Kennard."

"My wife and Kennard!"

He was very dull; but Lilian had won more from him than she knew. His cheeks burned, but it was in her defence.

"It's quite impossible. She likes him, of course; so do I."

"Yes, I know you do. This is what I want to say. That woman will try to make mischief, bringing some sort of evidence. Don't listen to her, don't believe her, promise me."

"Promise you what?"

Kenny was quite upset and confused. There couldn't be any truth in it, it was ridiculous. He could not understand what the Sphinx was driving at.

"Lilian is all right, she is not that sort at all," he reiterated. "As for Kennard——"

Words failed him. He wanted to say that Kennard was middle-aged, not to be compared with himself, also that Lilian adored him. He mistook service for love, never doubting but that he answered all a woman's needs.

Sybil read more than that in his hesitation; she could even smile, because he hesitated in saying it. Kenny thought, all their intimates thought, that Errington had been her lover. He would not hurt her by telling her that Errington was no longer young, that it was not likely Lilian would find him attractive. Kenny had been in the Guards, he had a Guardsman's contempt for a lawyer, considered in such a light as that in which he was now asked to regard him.

"Kennard comes a good bit to the house. He managed that trial all right, he likes the boy."

"Admires Lilian?"

"Oh, yes, they all do. By the way——"

A memory of that note which had been flung in the fire suddenly came to him, stopping his words.

"By the way?" she questioned. Now he looked at her.

Could there be? of course, there couldn't be, anything in it.

"Well, what do you want me to promise?" he asked, after that slight pause.

"Well, what do you want me to promise?" he repeated.

He wanted to get into the air and think, he wanted to get out of the Sphinx's embarrassing presence. He must have a talk with Lilian and tell her to be more careful. He almost realised, not quite, for he wasn't enough of a man to realise such a thing completely, that he meant to stick up for her, and believe in her, that he could never doubt his wife's fidelity or her candour, that, all unknowing, she had won him, and he wanted to tell her so.

But the Sphinx would not let him go until he had

promised that, now or never, whatever happened, whatever he heard, whatever proof or confession, he would believe nothing.

"Oh! confession! rot! you don't know her, it's all rot and lies." He interrupted her to say that, flushing redder.

But she went on. Whatever the circumstances, he was to swear, by all he held most sacred, by his pride in his boy, by all his hopes, by his fears, for she would haunt him if he disregarded her dying wish, that come what may, he would believe naught ill of Errington Welch-Kennard, he would never raise a hand to injure him, that no one should ever urge or force him to believe there was evil in the relations between him and Kenny's wife.

Duly Kenny swore, easily Kenny promised. Poor Sphinx! She acted for the best, but she made a great mistake. Kenny would never have believed anything against his wife that Elsa Beethoven might have told him. He could not but be moved by the Sphinx's forcing him to promise that, come what might, he would not injure the new M.P.

The Sphinx, when she was carried up to bed after Kenny had taken his departure, had no doubt of her achievement. She was "quite ready now," she told them, "quite ready."

It had always been understood that, when the end came, Errington was to be sent for. Her talk with Kenny had exhausted her terribly, the pain came on while she was being undressed, and put into bed. The morphia failed entirely.

Errington was there in time; he would always be glad to remember that he was there in time. This after-

noon he had wasted with Lilian, when he might have been with the Sphinx. He heard afterwards, that he might have been with her. But all he knew now was that he was there in time.

"Apollo has failed me," she gasped, "but you wouldn't fail me; you never have. I knew that when I told them to send. You'll stay with me to the end?"

"I'll stay, dear, I'll stay."

He could not keep his eyes dry, but he kept his voice steady. She bore her agonies like a martyr, like a saint. He stood by the bed all through the next attack, the tears streaming down his face; but, when she opened her eyes, he was on his knees, and his face was hidden against the blanket.

"That's over," she said, in a faint husky voice. "I'm nearly through, I think. Don't cry. It can't be worse where I'm going than it has been here, can it? Don't cry, I can feel the bed shake. There is nothing to cry about, because my journey is nearly ended. It's only the crossing that is so hard." She got this out slowly in short gasps. "I was always a bad traveller." She wanted to jest, still she wanted to jest.

There was quiet in the room after that. The window was open, for so she seemed to breathe better, although the night air was laden with cold and darkness. She opened her eyes to look at him; her eyes hardly left him whilst they had life in them. She looked small among her pillows, already shrunk and chill. Only he and the hired nurse, in stiff cap and manner, were there to help her through the last few furlongs of her journey.

"Oh! Sphinx, Sphinx!" was wrung from him. "You've been more than half my life. How am I to face the rest without you?"

Her spirit died so much more slowly than her body.

"There is Lilian," she gasped.

Of course, he was silenced, struck dumb. How had she known?

"How far has it gone? Tell me! tell me truly; you know I'm dying."

"There is nothing to tell you, nothing . . . a few kisses. I'm sorry you have heard. But there is nothing."

"Thank God!" she said, "Thank God! And you'll give it up?"

"It's over, dear, over, as if it had never been. How could I refuse you anything?"

"It hurt me so. I'm not jealous. I've never been jealous. But I wanted you to have the best. I know the best now, now when it is too late. The best is simple goodness, normal standards, commonplace. I know now, now when it is too late. I am so tired—I'm glad I'm dying, sinking, going to be dead, to lie still. You don't know how tired I am, too tired to go on with this breathing. . . ."

They brought her restoratives, and she recovered a little. It was a last flicker, but it seemed like returning life. She looked almost herself after the pain had passed, and she had drunk the restorative.

"Tell me," she went on again; it was always of him she was thinking: "Berenice has not disappointed you? I was right there. She was the wife for you; you are not sorry in your marriage?"

"My wife is an angel; all and more than a man could need. You were right there, you were always right."

"You won't hurt her?"

"No," his voice was choked; "God helping me, no, I never meant that."

"You know, have always known, what a woman wants. Just the love they give their children, unexact, just a breast for a tired head. I never had that, only cynical words, and evil teaching, the world's applause, and then its scorn."

Indeed, indeed she had suffered.

There was quiet again in the room.

"Dear, is it really well with you?" she asked again, opening her dim eyes, "I know I am troubled about you. I can't remember why." Her voice was growing always fainter. "It isn't about me—I can't remember."

He hesitated, but only for half a minute, he could not let her grope for what she wanted.

"You wanted to question me about Kenny's wife, you were troubled about me and Kenny's wife," he said gently, with a break in his voice. "But it's all right, dear, it's really all right."

"Do you care?"

Her words came with ever-increasing difficulty, and, in the irregular noisy breathing, and, in the sweat gathering on the sunken temples, they saw that she was struggling against another onslaught of her pains.

He was ashamed that it was of him, and his poor play she was thinking. But he knew her so well, even in her dying he must tell her the truth.

"No, Sphinx, no, I don't care. My wife and you are the only two women that have ever counted with me, that ever could count with me. But Lilian was so sure it was easy to be good—she had no fear of me. Vanity, pique, weakness, anything you like, led me to try to open her eyes. It is all past, forgive me, dear. I promise you. I swear it, I'll not jeopardise that career you want for me, that happiness of Berenice's. The memory

that it was of me you thought at such a time as this will strengthen me. But you know what I am, you have always known what I am."

"We are—what we have been made—you and I."

That attack, too, passed away. The injection of strychnine, the brandy and ether did their work. She went on talking presently, but less coherently, less connectedly.

"I have so much more to say, it's unkind of the devil to interrupt me, isn't it? Don't kneel there, don't hide your face from me. Am I hideous to look at, repulsive? People look beautiful when they are dead. How I wished Algernon would die when I first knew—understood. If he had only died then! But I have kept his name alive! Whatever they say of him, they will always talk about him; he hasn't been forgotten, I've been faithful to my vow, I've kept his name alive. They do his plays again now—hypocrites—what hypocrites they were! It wasn't of Algernon I sent for you to speak, was it? I forget—I forget again." And she lay thinking of it for a little time, her dying strength reviving in the silence.

"Errington," she began again presently, "how bad I have been! From the world's point of view, I mean. But after all, how little the world knows. I hurt no one, to begin with. I was really only a girl, stupid too, for all I thought myself so clever. Everybody hurt me, on purpose, just because I had married him, not knowing. And afterwards, they hurt me always. I never let them know. I felt it—the ostracism—now I'm dying of it. I've had love, lovers, I'm glad of that; don't let any one think I'm sorry about that. I've been so badly treated, stoned, but I have had something. The

'woman taken in adultery?' was she glad, in her stoning, I wonder? What had *her* husband taught her? How good you've been to me, the only one who ever was. Poor me! Even you don't quite know what it was at first."

"Oh! Sphinx, you hurt me, you hurt me. You were a child, a child when it all began, you never knew any better, they never gave you a chance, you never had a chance afterwards."

"Only because of what they did to him. How true, how eternally true, it is that cruelty is the only crime. We women, even I, find it unbearable. Through him they tortured me, every day I broke my stones with bleeding hands, and every night my bed turned to wood, and I tossed bruised and sleepless; and his degradation was my degradation. Don't cry, don't cry, it shakes me—and there are things I want to say."

"You are going into the darkness, Sphinx; no one to help you. I'm afraid, I'm afraid for you."

She was always the stronger; already his nerve was failing him.

"I *have* helped you? Tell me I have been able to help you sometimes, that I've been of use to you. Leave me that to comfort me," he pleaded.

But she had gone a little further off, she could not answer, she was too far to feel the assault of the last pain she would have to bear, she felt only it was there. She knew only she was still alive, because, somewhere in the distance she felt dimly that Death held the fort; the pain, her enemy, was beaten. There was no more pain for her. She smiled in her dying. Her breath was difficult, but her thoughts were clear, and she smiled stiffly with her lips turning blue.

"You have been everything to me, everything. Don't you know that? How strange that you don't know that. Now your work is done. Even the Sphinx's lawyer could not plead a cup of cold water for his client . . . where I am going."

He burst out crying at that, the hard painful sobs of a man. She did not hear him. In her ears were the moaning at the bar, and the roar of the infinite.

"What's right, Errington, what's wrong? I am not sure now—and now it is too late. We are only children, groping in the dark." It seemed as if her mind wandered further. "I've missed everything. Don't let Berenice miss what I've missed—my way, and everything."

"But you've had your place, Sphinx. And you've been proud and brave, and you've suffered, dear, you've won through suffering. Rest now. I can't pray. I can watch with you, but I can't pray with you. 'Is it well with the child? and He answered, It is well with the child.' That's all I remember. It will be well with you, I know it. Do you feel my arms round you, they will be round you to the end? I am holding you; you are not alone. Do you feel my kiss on your forehead? Here, nurse, the brandy again, that's right—have you anything more to say to me? Wait, drink this."

She opened her eyes once more, they were glazing fast, but she saw him.

"The Sphinx's lawyer!" she gasped out, "Oh! *plead*—what did I want to say? It wasn't all my fault! I haven't been happy, or good—but it wasn't all my fault—that unnatural punishment, that hideous death—" She tried, God help her, she tried to speak, though her lips were already cold, her eyes glazing. She tried

to say it lightly, though already Death had caught her throat, the last lover of all was throttling out her minutes, and the words could scarce come through.

He had to bend his head close for her last words. Something came through that clutch on her throat, a rattling sound, and with it, her last words:

"Plead—for—criminals."

CHAPTER XX

ERRINGTON could not go home after he had seen the Sphinx at last at rest. He was too agitated, too genuinely unhappy, he was not ready yet to take the comfort of his wife's love and sympathy. He knew both were awaiting him, but the tenderest touch is agony to an open wound. It would film over in a few hours, those few hours he must have alone.

The Sphinx died at half-past nine. He walked about the wet and dreary streets from then until twelve. The weather suited his mood. He was thinking, always thinking of that unhappy life, of how much more he might have done for its solace. That is the pain the dead leave behind them. How much more we might have done, what tender words we might have said, all the little acts of kindness we have omitted. He need not have reproached himself, but he did reproach himself. For now he could never again show her that he had understood her desolation, he could never again help her in that desolation.

At the time of his marriage, he had dreaded her claim upon him! Now she would make that claim no more. He saw the streets through a mist of tears; and grey sky and grey streets were full of the ache of his loss. Poor Sphinx, it had been a long martyrdom. Even Algernon had suffered less. Death had more quickly signed *his* passport.

Her words came back to him.

"Even the Sphinx's lawyer could not plead a cup of cold water for her . . . where I am going."

Could it be true? Terror shook his soul, for an instant the reeling world grew black. But his mind rejected it, his sane mind, and, in the rejecting, turning away desperately from that train of thought, by natural reaction he began to think of mundane things. He was the Sphinx's lawyer! Now he recollected that he had made her will for her, and that Kenny du Gore was the beneficiary. Kenny ought to be informed of her death.

Somehow, it was borne in upon him that he wanted to see Kenny. He had not wronged him, he would never wrong him now. The dead woman had laid her command upon him. And his fancy for Lilian was as dead as the Sphinx, it had been a weak thing, born of vanity, rootless; now it was dead.

He might as well see Kenny to-night, the fellow always sat up late, possibly he had a Bridge party. Anyway, he might as well go up and see; there were arrangements for the funeral to be made, matters to be discussed. He found himself in Park Lane; he took a hansom up to Eton Avenue.

Kenny, after leaving the Sphinx some few hours earlier, had gone home for that talk with Lilian; but she was already in bed, under the influence of the chloral. Not, perhaps, sorry of the respite, he had dressed and gone to the Piccadilly Club for dinner. He had drunk quite as much as was good for him during the day. He was exhilarated at the thought of his legacy, he was worried over what he had heard about his wife, he was annoyed that the Sphinx must die before he could come into that twenty-five thousand pounds. There was

only one thing for Kenny du Gore to do when he was exhilarated or depressed, uncomfortable or worried. It was to take more drink. And he did.

Then he played Bridge; and, of course, he played very badly, losing his partner's money as well as his own. Because he was a son of General du Gore, and had been in the Guards, it had been his supercilious habit to consider himself very superior to the other members of this somewhat disreputable club; yet it was about the only club in London to which he would have had a chance of election. To-night, being rather drunk, he was not only supercilious, but quarrelsome and aggressive. Many people would have stood it. The Piccadilly Club was a hotchpotch of bookmakers and betting men, theatrical managers, actresses' husbands, gambling tradesmen, and professional men without professions. Persons of these types are not, as a rule, anxious for a row. Their hobbies are money and bad women; they have no social status, and were quite content to be treated contemptuously by Kenny.

It was Kenny's ill luck that, when Tom Beaumont and Billy Beresford and George Jedward had put up with him long enough, Jimmy Jamieson should cut into the rubber. Jimmy had no pretensions to be a gentleman, but he was something of a pugilist, a big handsome fellow with a yellow moustache. He had a half-sleepy discontented manner, and his appearance had secured him in marriage the middle-aged reversion of one of London's most prominent *cocottes*. This lady had means, acquired from various illegitimate sources, and it was on the strength of these means that Jimmy had developed an insolence, if not matching Kenny's, at least, within measurable distance of it.

The two were at loggerheads within five minutes of Jimmy's sitting down. At first it was merely bluster and bad manners; but Kenny lost every rubber, and he was a bad loser. As he grew ruder and sulkier and more offensive, Jimmy became silky and suave and dangerous. It ended in Kenny launching an accusation of cheating, and Jimmy flinging a glass of whiskey and soda in his face. Kenny was very drunk, it was hardly fair fighting. Jimmy waited for the onslaught he had provoked, he planted one well-directed knock-down blow between the eyes and Kenny went down like a stone.

News of the row penetrated quickly through the club, and a crowd gathered round the belligerents. Waiters and the secretary came hurrying in; it was an unprecedented incident.

Everybody talked at once, questioning, commenting, exclaiming. Kenny staggered quickly to his feet, very muzzy and uncertain as to what had happened.

There must not be a public scandal; "The Piccadilly" could not afford that. What became of everything and everybody, Kenny could never make out. He found himself eventually in the hall, with Tom Beaumont talking to him like a father, and holding a glass to his lips.

"Here, have a drink before you go into the air. You'll soon be all right. You oughtn't to have told Jimmy he cheated, you ought to have remembered he was a bigger man than you. Why, he was the amateur middleweight champion in 1898. It was very foolish. But you are all right now, aren't you? The club won't make any fuss about it. Don't you worry."

Kenny found himself driving along in a four-wheeled cab, before he quite realised how he had got there. He

felt rather sick and shaken, and all that had been haunting him the whole evening dogged him with miserable persistence.

The drive was long, and down came the pitiless rain all the time. The windows were obscured, the miserable horse lurched and almost fell, recovered itself and jerked on. The dripping cabman seemed nearly asleep upon his box, and inside, Kenny, half stunned from the pommeling he had had, half drunk, damp and miserable, found his thoughts had gone back to the promise he had made to the Sphinx. Wet and cold, shaken and depressed, instinctively, his desire was for Lilian. She was a good sort. He was ill, he knew he was going to be ill. She would nurse him through it; he was glad he had stood up for her. He had told the Sphinx he did not believe anything against her. Ridiculous! that middle-aged lawyer fellow!

But after Finchley Road had been passed, and they had turned into the Avenue, the sleepy cabman recollected he had forgotten the number. Pulling down the shaky window with a jerk, Kenny put his head out and shouted at him, "What the devil are you waiting for? For God's sake, get on!"

That was the moment, when Kenny had put his unhappy head out of the window, that Errington, having driven up and found the house in darkness, was driving away again in the hansom, and passed him.

The light flashed into Errington's face an instant. Kenny saw him distinctly. He was driving away from Kenny's house—it was one o'clock in the morning! Kenny was suddenly stunned, almost sobered. It was unmistakably Errington Welch-Kennard, that lawyer fellow. He felt suddenly sick, not clear, or able to rea-

son, but shaken. What the devil was the fellow doing there?

The house was in darkness. With agitated hands Kenny turned up the electric light. The spirit-frame and soda water had been left for him as usual on the hall table. His mouth was dry, he had gone rather pale, too, round the lips. He felt somewhat as a man might have done who had seen a ghost, an apparition. Of course, it was a lie, a damned lie. But what was the fellow doing there at one o'clock in the morning? His mouth was dry, and his hands were not very steady. It is possible the drink he mixed himself had little soda in it. He *had* believed in something. In all his worthlessness and ingratitude, in all his meannesses and rude speech, he had not been really oblivious of Lilian's quality. He had known, he had known quite well that in all her impulsiveness and quick temper, through all his contempt and indifference, she had maintained her own ideal of conduct. He was not stupid, only weak and vicious, and he realised quite well that his wife had natural nobility of character, generosity and instinctive purity. He had told the Sphinx that nothing could shake his belief in her.

But the sight of Errington Welch-Kennard driving away from his house at one o'clock in the morning had shaken it. He sat down on the stairs half-way up. And now, perhaps, that too strong dose of whiskey he had taken to steady his nerves began to mount to his brain. He forgot all about what the doctor had said of the necessity for quiet for her, he forgot the influenza, and the chloral, and everything he ought to have remembered. He made up his mind that he would have it out with her. He wouldn't put up with it. So this was why the

Sphinx had made him promise. She knew all about it. She was going to make a —— of him. Not he, he would see them damned first. He would tell her what he thought.

He shook the handle, he hammered on the door, a sudden access of rage came upon him, he wanted to get at her. Damn her, damn Kennard, damn them both. But the door held, and his rage left him as suddenly as it had come. Now he began to grumble, sat down again on the stairs, and grumbled like a child. He was so damned unlucky, everything was against him. Jamieson had cheated him to-night, and the jockey had pulled Jetley to-day, he knew he did. What was the good of the money the Sphinx had left him? He couldn't raise anything on it; she might alter her will at any time. And he would have to find that eighty pounds by Monday. Lilian would have to ask her father for it, she was a good sort, Lil. He didn't believe anything against her, he wanted to tell her so. He shook at the door again.

Then he remembered. Poor Lil! she was ill. She mustn't be disturbed; but he wanted to talk to her, to tell her he believed in her; and about Jetley and Jimmy Jamieson. He had lost about twenty pounds at the Club, too, he had been cheated out of it; but he supposed he'd have to settle. Everything was always against him, no one ever had such ill-luck as he, it began at Eton. Other fellows could do things, but he was always found out. Now he owed that eighty.

He even shed a few maudlin tears on the staircase over his ill luck. He wanted to talk to Lilian about it, but her door was locked. He kept remembering that, and forgetting why it was locked.

But the lawyer fellow couldn't have got in if it had been locked!

The long day, the knock-down blow, the repeated drinks, had muddled Kenny's brain. He was so "infernally miserable." And not a soul to talk to! Perhaps the boy was awake! He'd know who had been there. She would have been up to see him, to say good-night, if she'd been out of bed. She was a good mother, she loved that kid. What a fool he was to think there was anything wrong about her.

She would want to know if the boy was all right. Three or four times last night, and the night before, she had gone upstairs to see. He had told her she was a fool, she had let the cold air in upon him when she had got out of bed.

Now she was ill herself. Poor Lil was ill! Maudlin sentiment, or desire for company, drove his stumbling footsteps up the nursery stairs. The boy had been sleeping restlessly, he was barely convalescent, and Kenny's noisy entrance woke him.

"Daddy, is that you, daddy?"

"Yes, that's me. Well, how are you? Want to get up, eh?"

The boy smiled, just the pretty loving smile of sleepy childhood. Kenny, in his desire for companionship, the hatred he had just then for solitude, lifted him unsteadily out of bed, on to his knee. He was small and thin in his white night-gown, and he became suddenly chilled and half frightened; he began to struggle.

"Put me back, daddy, put me back! You smell of somefink nasty. I want to get into bed again."

This woke nurse. In his haste to get away from his father's breath, back into the warmth of his sweet bed,

Everard kicked his father, struck him with his puny fists, told him he hated him, and began to whimper when he found himself safe.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," nurse said, rushing in indignantly *en déshabille*, a hastily donned grey dressing-gown, and an array of Hinde's hair-curlers, "disturbing the child, and him not out of his illness yet. There's the missus too, ill as ill can be, me sitting in the dressing-room, and Jane not knowing if she was safe with that there sleeping draught, and the door locked. And not half an hour ago, I came upstairs. And now for you to come and disturb the house! A pretty master you call yourself; you're drunk, that's what you are. Don't cry, my pretty, father's drunk, no sight for little boys." She began to soothe and pet him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said again to her master.

He ought to be ashamed of himself, he was no sight for little boys!

"Well, don't look at me," he said sullenly. "You needn't look at me."

"Are you crying, daddy? Is daddy crying?" For Everard had been quickly comforted, and now was curious and interested.

"I'd make him cry if it was me. I'd teach him to come home at one o'clock in the morning, frightening decent people out of their wits."

Surely, it was an impression that daddy cried, Everard had in his mind, as he dropped off to sleep again, an impression that nurse had scolded daddy, who said everybody and everything was against him.

When Kenny had stumbled back to his own quarters, he began to remember that nurse had been damned

impertinent to him. Everybody was rude to him; he counted for nothing in his own house. His clothes were damp, he was aching all over, and he felt cold and wronged and desperately miserable. There was sure to be a fire in Lil's room. It would have done her no harm to sit up and talk to him a little. Of course, he knew there was nothing between her and the lawyer, only she was so "damn selfish." Why could not she unlock the door and let him talk? The thought of that other room, so warm and friendly, with Lil to talk to, exasperated him. He tried the door again, impatient with the handle; but still the chloral held her. For the last time, perhaps, she slept in peace.

He turned away at last. He even began slowly to undress. He caught sight of himself in the glass as he took off his collar. Jimmy had done his work well. One of Kenny's eyes was red, already it was beginning to swell, the cheek was puffy and discoloured, and he looked sodden and soiled and disreputable. For a fraction of a second the mirror was a magic one, and the marred disreputable figure that he saw was the core of him, the real Kenny. And this was his father's son!

Once that father had told him he ought to cut his throat, that he brought disgrace on every one connected with him. And what had nurse said? He ought to be ashamed of himself. Well, he was quite suddenly ashamed, and he hated what he saw in the glass.

Now he saw only his inflamed eye. What a beast he looked in the glass, unsteady, half drunk! Well, it was half her fault. If she had not flirted with that damned lawyer! Now she lay sleeping like a pig. She had given him up, and the boy had shoved him away, kicked him. Perhaps they'd both be glad if he was dead.

Where was that damned pistol of his? He recollected he had it somewhere. She would wake quickly enough if she heard a shot!

Of course, this was the real motive, the real influence, that moved him. To wake her up, to have her to talk to, to get companionship.

The pistol was handy enough, in the drawer of the dressing-table. Providence occasionally errs in not interfering at critical moments. Kenny's hand shook, and he had no more genuine desire in his fuddled brain to make an end of himself than he had had in the beginning of the evening, yet he took the pistol out of its case and fingered it.

"Well," he thought, "if I am drunk I can cock a pistol." And he cocked it, and pointed it towards the lurching figure in the mirror.

"I've only got to shoot straight and it will go through his eye. What a noise it will make, what a fine smash! She'll wake fast enough then. Lord, what a fright she'll have!"

He turned the pistol round.

"By Jove! I don't think it's possible to commit suicide. What rot fellows do talk! I can't aim at myself. It wobbles all over the place. Suppose I have a real shot for it, it wouldn't matter, I'd be well out of it; the bookies would be pretty sick, they wouldn't get that eighty, and Jimmy wouldn't get his twenty—serve him right."

He was swaying about a little in front of the glass, and the pistol, though he had aimed it straight enough at the red eye he saw in the glass wavered in his shaking hand when he turned it towards himself, and, instead of his first finger, he put his thumb on the trigger.

"Damned if I don't have a shot for it, I won't put it close, I'll just aim. Here goes. Good-bye, Kenny du Gore, you've been a ripping bad lot, now you're going to hell."

It was a hair trigger; whether he meant it or not, the pistol went off with a flash. There was only one scream, that one half choked. The pistol fell from his nerveless hand, all smoking. There was a smell of gunpowder, and the smoke that filled the room obscured his eye-sight. There had been only that one scream. The little figure that had pushed him away, kicking him, the little slender nightgowned figure, was lying on the floor face downward.

"What, boy! Is that you, Kiddie!"

He knelt down beside the child, turned him over, mumbled over him, talked to him, could not realise what had happened, went on talking to him, promised he should be a soldier if he liked, told him he ought to stand fire better than that, burst into loud sobs, and begged him to get up, then became a madman in the next ten minutes, and raved to God to give him another chance, just one more chance.

Still Lilian slept, slept mercifully and peacefully, whilst all the house was roused, and frightened women stood huddled together, crying over the cold stiffening little figure, in its white nightgown, weeping over the child, who had become suddenly conscience-stricken because he "had been unkind to daddy, rude to daddy," and had gone through the door Kenny had left open, down the stairs he had left lighted up, to say that he was sorry; for that too was Lilian's teaching.

Poor little stiffening figure! The women sobbed and cried over it, lifting it back presently to the warm bed

from which it had been called so suddenly to Eternity, straightening the thin limbs, closing the blue eyes, still wide open, as when they had stared at daddy, "playing soldiers before the glass," and the swift impression and terror had been crystallised in them.

CHAPTER XXI

KENNY's raving quieted down a little, when the doctor came.

"It, it can't be much. I can't have hurt him. The pistol went off, I did not know he was there. He has only fainted; of course, it's only a faint. You must send for another doctor, a surgeon, we'll have the best advice in England. There can't be much wrong, it was all done in a second."

"I should think not, probably not." Dr. Lewis had answered soothingly, before he went upstairs. If it was the worst, there would be time enough to tell him. Now he could only urge him to be quiet, not to wake his wife from her drugged sleep, to warn him that the consequences to her might be serious.

But, once he was in the night nursery, with the weeping women, and that little figure on the bed, already rigid and stiffening, pathetically defined and small under the sheet that had been thrown over him, he knew that there was no use summoning a surgeon or any further medical help. The bullet had gone right through the temple, the little black mark over the eye told its unmistakable tale. He made a brief examination, then drew the lids gently over the glazed eyes.

"It must have been instantaneous, there was no suffering, no pain. Be glad of that," he said. He had children of his own, his voice had a note in it that said so.

"It—it can't have killed him! You must try some-

thing—you must do something. Don't stand there as if there was nothing to be done."

Then, for what was before him was unmistakable, and even he could not doubt it, he fell into trembling and cold sweat, into hysteria and abuse, imprecation, horrible self-accusations.

Manny Henry played the man when he arrived on the scene. All his hopes and ambitions had centred in that little cold figure on the bed. No one knew what dreams he had nurtured, what self-sacrifice he had been capable of, what a capacity of idealisation his rough exterior concealed. All his fineness had concentrated upon his grandson, lying now like a chiselled Flaxman, marble-white and beautiful.

"Why wasn't it 'im?" he asked, with that first heavy sob that broke from him on entering the room; but, after that, he played the man. There was Lilian to be thought of, the truth must be concealed from her as long as possible, Kenny must be hushed and got rid of.

He was finally quieted with an injection of morphia, and taken from the house. In the hush that settled over it then the poor mother could finish her sleep.

Kenny raved of many things in the first shock of finding he had killed his son. But, what he said of Kennard, did not prevent Manny asking the lawyer's help for the inquest which Dr. Lewis told him was inevitable, asking his help to avoid, as far as possible, the publicity that would follow.

"'E talked about you an' Lil; some talk about what that wife of Sam's had said. I took no notice of it, she has always been a bad lot, always. It won't prevent you helping us through?" he said to the lawyer.

"No!" the other answered briefly.

It was a very silent and different Kennard that came up to Eton Avenue in the early morning. He was full of the sense of his own responsibility, and he dreaded having to face Lilian. What use would his perfunctory tenderness be in such a grief as hers? Any desire or feeling for her had evanesced as if it had never been. It was not that he was bound by his promise, it was that he had no wish to break it.

He had arrived home late the night before, and had not seen Berenice. This morning she had come down to breakfast, with face so newly bright, hopes so newly raised, he had not quickly been able to tell her that the Sphinx had died. Berenice had been, for once, oblivious momentarily of the cloud on his forehead, she had not noted that his head was heavy and that he had no speech. She had been all gladness this morning, voluble beyond her wont, and claiming his ear for talk of Harry, and what yesterday had brought him.

It seemed that a great physician had seen Harry in the afternoon, and made a prolonged examination of his lungs. He had pronounced the case far from hopeless, very far from hopeless. Harry was to have injections of tuberculin, complete cure was possible. Only, his mind was to be kept calm and easy, he was to have absolute freedom from worry; and that had been provided for, too. Harry was going a voyage round the world, in a hospital ship, especially fitted for such cases. It had all been fixed up quickly. He was to have a valet and his own hospital nurse, there were only five other patients, and two doctors would accompany the trip. In its way it was an experimental one, but great results were anticipated. It combined the open-air cure with

the tuberculin, rest, milk, and massage. Berenice was so happy over it. It solved the Elsa Beethoven problem, for it was impossible for her to follow or communicate with him for at least six months; and, by then, he would be strong enough to cope with her, or she might have found a new interest and be willing to let him alone. Everything seemed possible to Berenice this morning.

"You have been so good about it all, so dear and good," she said to Errington, "letting me keep him here and look after him. But, Errie, dear, none of your goodness is wasted. You know that; I don't always tell you what I think of you, but I do believe you realise it."

They were seated at breakfast when she poured out her tale, and over the coffee she made her little speech of gratitude. Of course, he deprecated it, it even hurt him. She was a thousand times too good for him, just now he was full of the knowledge of it. He began to tell her why he had been late last night, for she never questioned his movements. He began to break to her that the Sphinx had passed into the eternal silence.

It was then that the butler rushed in with a long face, a very undignified entry for such a dignified man. The telephone had been ringing wildly, but that is a way with the telephone. It had not interrupted their conference; but the man's face struck both of them.

"There 'as bin an accident," he began, "Mr. 'Enry wants to speak to you on the telephone. 'Is grandson 'as been killed."

"Oh, good God! not little Everard, not that dear boy!" For once Errington's self-control failed him. "That accursed woman! What has she done, what has she said?"

"It's 'is father as has killed 'im," went on the man, who had heard all the gossip from Jane, and was posted in detail. "It wasn't any woman, sir. It was Mr. du Gore, who came home drunk——"

"That will do, that will do, you can go."

Errington could not bear to hear it, his nerve seemed suddenly to leave him.

The Sphinx's death had shaken him. Now the knowledge that Elsa had been working mischief, the sudden doubt as to where that mischief had led, seized him by the throat.

"The boy dead—dead—that bright little fellow, impossible, incredible, damnable. Had Kenny heard any gossip? Good God! what awful thoughts are coming to me, I can't face it. Berenice, what has he heard?"

He was all shocked and shaken, not master of himself, talking quite wildly.

"Surely he couldn't have believed any damned gossip. This room is so infernally hot. How will Manny take it? He warned us." His face was white, and his manner alarming. "It's with me, as with all that set. I bring evil upon everything I touch. I was only fit company for them, and for the Sphinx, I ought never to have tried to get out."

It was an Errington that the Sphinx knew, but one that his wife had never seen.

But love is the finest teacher in the world. It loosened all her natural reticence, showed her how to treat and comfort him. Such an abandonment of petting and soothing, and sympathetic tears, such a rush of tender words, told him how good and sweet and dear he was, and that his mistakes could never weigh against his suc-

cesses. She would not listen to his broken confession about himself, she hushed his self-accusations, holding his face against her shoulder.

"The dear little fellow, so full of promise! His grandfather's pride in him was so fine. 'Evil will come of it,' Manny Henry said. But in my wretched vanity and self-confidence I carried my point. And Lilian! that poor mother!" He accused himself in his relations with Lilian.

"I know, dear, I know," she said, crying with him, holding his head against her breast, soothing him, not heeding his words.

"You have been good to her, I am so glad you have been good to her. Poor thing, poor thing! You must go to her as soon as you are able. You must try to help her through. Darling! don't try to tell me what I sha'n't believe. Let me love and pet you, you have so often petted me. It is sad, terribly sad, an accident, a pure accident, I am sure. We will go up there together, as soon as you are able. We will try to help them."

When he had recovered himself, his breakdown being but of short duration, he obeyed Manny's summons. What he heard at Eton Avenue made him believe it was, indeed, an accident, and that, beyond the responsibility of having brought Kenny and Lilian together again, he had none in the matter. Some slight uneasiness lingered when Manny said Kenny had let fall some words about him and Lilian; but it was obvious they had made no impression on the old man; he was ready to depend upon the lawyer for everything.

In the course of the morning, too, Berenice drove up.

She saw Manny that morning, and won his heart. But Lilian was invisible. Her door had eventually to

be broken open, the sleeping draught had proved rather too potent. She was in the hands of doctors and hospital nurses, quite seriously ill, knowing nothing of what had befallen her.

Her illness lasted over a week. Meanwhile, there had been the funeral from Hans Crescent, and the inquest held on the child, Harry Annesley had left England, fortunately without interruption from Elsa, and life at Prince's Gate had resumed its normal aspect.

As long as possible, Lilian was kept in ignorance of what had happened. For a few days after she was convalescent, she was soothed with false stories explaining why her husband stayed away from her, why her boy could not come into the room. But, in the end, Manny Henry told her, as well as he was able, first, that she was childless, then that it was to her husband she owed the anguish of her bereavement.

There is no grief so terrible as that which shakes a woman from whose arms Death has wrenched a little child. For a short time the agony of her bleeding heart, the tortures of her ravishment, the throb and ache of her childlessness, held her to the exclusion of everything else. Under the weight of that crushing knowledge, everything went from her but the memory of baby sweetness, lisped speeches, moist soft kisses.

When, at length, it became inevitable, she heard the wretched details of the inquest.

"That lawyer fellow, Welch-Kennard, managed everything," her father told her.

She had forgotten Kennard. His eyes and arms, his lips and the warmth of them, her emotion, and her shame in it, had been part of those fevered dreams, her delirium and disordered fancies. She could hear his

name, and it awoke nothing in her at first, but gratitude for all that her father told her he had done, and was doing, for them.

"They brought it in 'accidental death.' Accidental death!" he repeated, with a choke in his throat. "He ought to 'ave swung for it; if I'd 'ad my way he would 'ave swung for it." Then he went on to tell her what one of the jurymen had said, when they had all filed into the room to see the body.

"He was covered over with flowers, there was hardly anything to be seen but his dear little face, 'Oh, God! ain't he beautiful?' the foreman said; and then he just burst into tears, cried he did, and some of the others cried too! It was cruel——"

"Who put the flowers about my boy?" the poor mother asked when she was able to speak.

"Everybody sent; but it was the lawyer's wife who came and arranged them, knelt down, she did, nurse told me, and cried as if her 'eart was breaking. She's got no child of her own. I couldn't say nothin' to her, though, if her husband hadn't interfered, you'd have got rid of him, nothing wouldn't have happened—I knew harm would come of it."

"Oh, don't, father, don't!"

She couldn't bear to think that. She must put away from her the fear, the thought, that it was anybody's fault, that what had occurred was through anything she had done or left undone. It was an accident, a pure accident. She must force her mind to accept that, or she could not face the future. The light of her firmament had gone out, but accident had quenched it, not the lawyer's influence or her weakness in yielding to it.

Kenny did not know, there was nothing for Kenny to have known.

She said it over and over again, to reassure herself. For, as she grew less numb, the reassurance became more and more necessary. She tried to tell her father this, to force comfort from him. She made a little heart-broken confession of her passages with Kennard, but it made no impression upon him; dalliance was something Manny Henry could not understand.

"There's nothing to reproach yourself with, my pretty. Don't you cry about that; your daddy knows. I 'ad a good wife myself, your mother's daughter couldn't do nothing she was ashamed of. If he persuaded you back he did what he thought was the right, and if he was attentive to you afterwards, it was no more than he ought to 'a been. And, as for liking him, so do I, though 'e did do us such a bad turn. And I like 'is wife too. I want to give her something, something that was 'is, she'd like that. And I'll subscribe to her charities. He looked a picture, he did, under those flowers she brought. And she had the grave all lined with green, so it was like putting 'im in a nest. I should never have thought of that, I shouldn't. Don't you go for to think you was wrong in liking 'im, or 'er neither, though he did bring that 'orror on us. But we've got shut of that villain now. Thank the Lord we've got shut of him now."

For, he had made arrangements to rid Lilian of her husband, and he was getting some little satisfaction out of that. Lilian did not realise this. Where was Kenny? Why did he not come to her? Where was he? Her days and nights began to be full of this question.

Meanwhile, there her father sat, talking, crying to

himself sometimes, but talking all the time of the boy's pretty ways, of what he had said last Christmas, or a few days ago, or on his birthday, maddening her with memories of the sweetness gone from her. She thought she liked him sitting there, talking, talking always of the cruelty of it, but, in truth, it helped neither of them.

Soon she began to be haunted by what had occurred the evening before her illness, by unspoken fear and terror. Her liking for Errington was as dead as his for her; it was her husband she wanted, Everard's father. He did not think, surely he did not believe, he had not heard—and intangible possibilities assailed her.

"Where is Kenny?" she asked again and again.

"Never you mind about Kenny, he won't trouble you no more. I've seen to that, you make 'aste and get well. Then I'll take you away for a bit, we might run over to Paris, or the Riviera; never you mind about Kenny. We'll sell up this place, you'll come home along of me, and, when we are settled, we'll have all the toys sent over to Russell Square. We'll set 'em up, you an' me, and play with them; and pretend he's looking on, that'll 'earten you. We'll have out the soldiers an' the rockin'-'orse; I'm glad I gave him a skin one, you mind what he said about it?"

She had forgotten none of her boy's phrases, she found them come sobbing back to her in the watches of the night, out of the darkness.

"She's a nice gal, that gal the lawyer married," Manny went on, "she helped me with all his treasures, we wouldn't let no one else touch 'em. She thought later on, p'r'aps you'd like to have some boys over sometimes from the Foundling, and let 'em play with 'em. She said p'r'aps you'd take an interest in one or another,

that you'd take up with some children who 'adn't got no mothers, nor grans. . . ." Then the outside broker broke down again, and cried because there was no one to call him "gran" and ask him for toys.

Each day, however, as Lilian grew stronger, the desire for Kenny, for her husband, to know what had become of him, why he was keeping away from her, grew stronger too. There was no use asking her father. Whenever she tried to bring the conversation round to Kenny, he shifted away from it. To him Kenny was a murderer. The law might call it an accident, but to Manny it was neither more nor less than murder.

It was he who kept Kenny away. Errington doubted his wisdom in so-doing; and, not only his wisdom, but his right, in assuming the moral responsibility of such a step.

"It would kill 'er to see him. I'm not goin' to allow it, Mister. You over-rid me once, but I know what I'm about. She dreads it, that's what's keeping her back. You get 'im off, get 'im off to Australia, or New Guinea, or anywhere, the un'olesomer the better. I don't care what I pay so long as I get rid of him. I sha'n't tell Lily nothing until he's gone, until we've seen the back of 'im."

"It isn't right," Berenice said, when Errington told her what was being done. "It isn't right." She repeated, almost word for word, what Errington himself had said to Lilian two months ago. "They are husband and wife, the child was the child of their love. She has a duty to him, whatever he has done."

But Manny would not listen to argument.

Kenny had not defended himself, or his conduct, at the inquest. It had needed all Errington Welch-Ken-

nard's strength and influence, all his tact and experience, to prevent Kenny accusing himself of murder. As it was, it took two sittings before the Coroner's jury was able to deliver itself of the inevitable verdict. In the meantime, Kenny was being taken charge of by a medical friend of the lawyer's. He needed professional care; grief, remorse, and fear had made havoc with him.

For some few days after the tragedy he had trembled on the brink of sanity. He was so completely shattered in nerves, that he really seemed hardly responsible for his actions. He heard of the Sphinx's death and his legacy; but, beyond saying that he knew all about it, and that it was no good to him now, he made no comment.

At first he asked constantly after his wife, but, when he had been convinced that she would not see him, nor hear of him, he collapsed into sullen misery and hopelessness. He was in the mood to agree to anything that was arranged for him, anything that took the burden of living, or of thinking, off his shoulders.

"I suppose she thinks I did it on purpose," he said more than once.

Manny, who brought himself to interview his son-in-law, left him under that impression, purposely left him under it.

"You'll kill her too, if you force yourself upon her," he said. "You'd better go away for a bit. It's the only thing you can do, is to go away for a bit."

"I suppose you are counting on my throwing myself overboard one dark night, when I've got the jim-jams," Kenny said.

That is just what Manny was counting on. For, the doctor under whose charge Kenny was, had told them:

"He'll drink himself to death in no time if he goes -

on as he is doing now. He has champagne from eleven in the morning, and he takes spirits at all hours of the day and night. The poor wretch can't sleep; I hear him walking up and down half the night, talking to the boy as if he were there."

Errington, who had to see Kenny about business, about winding up the Sphinx's estate, and various matters connected with it, was anything but satisfied with what was being done. Compromise had been the one text from which he had preached, and always he had meant the best; but this was failure, complete, absolute, tragic. It needed all his wife's ministering, all her belief in him, and its encouragement, to prevent him from exaggerated self-blame; and even she failed to persuade him, or herself, that they were doing right. Yet, it was difficult to move, difficult to act, in opposition to Manny.

Had it not been for Elsa Beethoven, nevertheless, it is possible that Kenny would have been allowed to go, that Lilian would have been left in ignorance of his going, left to a lifetime of remorse, and haunting doubt.

Elsa got to know that Harry was no longer at Prince's Gate. She could not ascertain his whereabouts. There was no use going again to Errington's office, the clerks all knew her, they would not let her in. Berenice was easier of access. Elsa had heard about the accident, and about Kenny not defending himself. She put her own evil construction upon it. And Manny himself told her that Kenny was going away, that Welch-Kennard was arranging his affairs. Berenice should hear, Elsa determined Berenice should hear. She would not open her letters, she would not tell where was Harry, nor let her see him, well, Elsa would tell her something.

She waylaid Berenice as she had been wont to waylay

Errington; but Berenice gave her courteous audience. She was just stepping into her carriage, but she was quite prepared to delay her drive. In truth, Harry being already in the Mediterranean, out of reach, she had no fear of Elsa, only disgust, and an infinite contempt.

"You wish to speak to me?" she said. "You can wait, James. Come in here, Mrs. Beethoven; we need not talk in the street." She led the way into the library, but did not sit down. "Now," she said, "now, Mrs. Beethoven. What is it you want of me?"

What Elsa had to say was so much, so voluminous, so wild, that it was difficult for Berenice to keep her attention on it. It seemed that she had come between Harry and the love of his life, that she had made him act villainously, wickedly. Elsa had given up her home, her good name, her children, for Harry.

"But my husband tells me you are still with Mr. Beethoven," Berenice interrupted, when she had heard it all for the second or third time.

"Oh! your husband told you! Did he? Zat nice, zat good, husband of yours, who deceive you viz my niece. And now he sends Kenny away zat it shall be easier, zat no one shall interfere. Kenny, he knows, he knows vy he is being sent away. But he don't care. Zat is vy he killed ze boy, but now he don't care. Oh! you are a nice pair. You keep me from my Harry, so good you are; but he, he must have his mistresses. And ven Sybil, she dies, he must have Lilian! Oh! you are ze brood of vipers. . . ."

Berenice was all compound of faith and purity, and her love and gratitude for her husband could neither fade nor fail. But, something he himself had told her

that the Sphinx had said of him and Lilian, something she had heard from Manny, a few broken words—

"You sink I not know. Your husband he vas zere zat night, before ze boy was killed. I saw him, in ze dark, he stayed mit her three hours in ze dark. Zen I told the Sphinx it vas disgraceful. I said I vould tell Manny, everybody. But she tell Kenny herself, zen zis 'appened. Oh! I know, I know a lot of zat fine 'usband of yours. Of course, he made out it vas an accident. It vas no accident."

For a moment Berenice's heart stopped beating. Her faith held, but what was this story, what truth was there in this story? She went very pale, and Elsa saw that at last a bullet had gone home.

"You ask, you ask him ven he come home," she said triumphantly. "Ask him vere he vas zat afternoon, vy he pull ze blinds down."

The room swayed a little with Berenice; she knew he had been there. In that first breakdown, when he had heard of the boy's death, he had said he was there.

"And it vas the second time. Once I saw zem to-gezzet, he vas holding her—so!" The dramatic gesture accentuated Berenice's faintness; but she grasped the back of a chair, she held herself erect.

"You are a bad and wicked woman," she said, quite steadily. Her face and her lips were pale, and the grip of her hands on the back of the chair was tight; but she held her head erect.

"There is not a word of truth in the story you have been telling me, not one word. It is Mr. Henry who wishes Mr. du Gore to leave the country, not my husband."

"You ask him. You ask him if he vas zere all zat

afternoon." She was triumphant, exultant. There was a look in Berenice's face that any woman could read. At last she had been able to get at her, to hurt her.

"You tell me you don't believe, but you do believe. I see it in your face. Oh! I could tell you sings about him, ozzer sings."

Berenice's voice was steady, also her intention, although she had not been able to control the blood that had fled from her face and lips. Deliberately she walked over to the fireplace and rang the bell.

"You can stay here, or go. I will not remain in the same room with you. I did not think any one could be so bad. My dear husband could do no wrong in my eyes. If he spent one afternoon, or two, or any time, with your niece, it was for some wise, kind purpose. You have not injured him in my eyes."

She kept her head up, the flag of her proud confidence flying. But, alone in her room (she could not at once face the streets), alone in her room, nature held sway with her. She could cry, like other women. She had not the vanity to think she could suffice him. She had borne, as proud women bear pain, biting back their moans, wordless, the knowledge of his intimacy with the Sphinx, of her influence over him. Perhaps there had been a relief when she had heard of Sybil's passing. Now she was confronted with this. And in the solitude of her own room she passed through the bitter waters. Her love held, her faith held. It was her humility that made the water so bitter. She knew the Sphinx's superior wit. Perhaps Kenny's wife, perhaps this Lilian, was clever too, superior to her. And Errington was different from all other men; she would never stand in his way, he must have the companionships he needed.

He loved her, she knew he loved her. And presently she grew comforted, through faith and humility and, above all, through love.

When she left her room, uplifted, ready to accept whatever Errington had prepared for her, it was of Kenny's banishment she thought first. She knew this was not Errington's doing; he had said again and again he did not think it right, that he would have no hand in it.

But still, what that dreadful woman had said might, nevertheless, have a substance of truth behind the foulness of its shadows.

Kenny might be going away thinking that his banishment was at Errington's instigation. It was to Kenny Berenice would go. Errington had taken her with him once already. She would go again, she would challenge his suspicions, if he had suspicions, as Elsa had said. She would set her husband right in his eyes. There was no pause or hesitation in the direction she gave the footmen.

"Boundary Road," she said. "Tell him to drive quickly."

As it happened, Errington was sitting with Kenny when she was shown up into that dreary sitting-room. The atmosphere was stagnant and heavy, stale smoke hung about it, a bottle of whiskey stood upon the table, a siphon of soda and the empty glass. She had come swiftly, hardly staying to reason, filled with passionate desire that her husband should have justice, that, at least, Kenny du Gore should not say, should not think, it was Errington who banished him. Once more she had forgotten herself, her wrongs, if indeed she had wrongs; it was on Errington and Kenny her mind was intent, neither of them must be hurt by Elsa.

She had her reward, her sudden sweet reward. For, her coming had been unexpected, and, as her husband rose to greet her, the gladness of his face, the welcoming smile, the outstretched hand and welcome, told her surely, flashed it to her, that she had been right to have no fear. He was glad in her unexpected coming, indeed he loved her.

"That is right; but how did you know I was here? I suppose they told you at the office?" His voice had the deep note in it that she loved. How tall and fine he looked when he stood up in the shabby room.

He turned to Kenny to explain, sparing her speech.

"My wife has taken it into her head lately that she must drive me daily to St. Stephen's. I'm late as it is; but we had so many things to settle. What have you got, the motor or the brougham? I'm really glad to be saved that long solitary drive."

The smile went right into her eyes, dazzling her with her own certainty. She returned it right sweetly.

"I was afraid I might be in the way, if you were still talking business."

"It is very kind of you to come," Kenny said.

But it was obvious how little her coming affected him. All through that last interview he had been quite sullen and indifferent, he had signed all the papers the lawyer had brought him without reading them.

"It's sure to be all right," he answered Errington, "and I don't care if it isn't. I've no one to look after. I'd just as soon you had it as anybody."

All the interview had been painful to the lawyer. There was no feeling in his heart toward Kenny but pity. He would have given anything to be able to help him; but it was impossible. Against Kenny's sullenness,

heaviness, indifference, he could make no way. Indeed, Errington was glad of Berenice's coming, and that the weary task was ended.

Now he tried to speak cheerily to Kenny of his journey, of the Captain, and the record speed of the boat, of the catering, and the possible good company he would meet. Berenice seconded him well. But Kenny only said, he "supposed it was all right."

She wanted to say to him: "Is it suspicion of my husband that is driving you away?" She was eager to tell him, "It is not my husband who wishes you to go." But she had no opportunity.

Somehow, it no longer seemed so important to say it to him, as it had been on her way here, as it had been when Elsa had spoken. Everything was clearer, simpler, since her husband had smiled his welcome to her, since she was here beside him. Her own happiness had flooded suddenly back to her; she had not doubted him, but there is ebb and flow in certainty, and it was no longer ebb.

The good-byes had been spoken, they were already at the door, when Kenny, with a slight hesitation, a reluctance, as if he had difficulty in getting it out, said:

"I suppose—I suppose Lil wouldn't see me—she doesn't want to see me before I go. She's as hard as nails about me, I suppose—thinks I did it on purpose. But, Kennard" (he was thinking only of himself, not at all of what Berenice might know, or be ignorant about, quite selfish and oblivious of anything but himself), "you might tell her one day, I'd like her to know, that I didn't believe a word of that story, the story that Elsa Beethoven is putting about,—about her and you, you know. She came here jawing, but I wouldn't

listen, I turned her out. I knew it was all lies. Tell Lilian that I never believed it for a moment."

"Of course, of course," Errington answered quickly, his face flushing. "A stupid lie! We won't bother my wife with it."

He hated that Berenice should hear, he dreaded what Kenny might say next, he went on hurriedly:

"But I haven't seen her, you know. I don't think I'm likely to see her. It is through your father-in-law I hear of her anxiety that you should go away."

"Let *me* give her your message, Mr. du Gore. I should like to take your message to your wife."

She met her husband's eyes quite bravely. By the quick flush in her face, he knew she had heard something, that the story, or some version of it, had reached her ears. What a woman she was! And she saw the appreciation in his eyes. Now there was nothing but happiness in her heart.

"Let *me* take your message," she said.

"If you like," answered Kenny heavily. "I don't care who tells her, but I want her to know."

"Poor devil! You need not bother about his message, no one need bother about his message," Errington said, when he followed his wife into the brougham. "He will drink himself to death on the voyage. There isn't a chance for him."

He did not put his appreciative glance into words, did not question her flushed cheek, quickened pulses, glistening eyes. All the way from St. John's Wood to Westminster he rallied her on her fetching him to his parliamentary duties, rallied her, too, on her silence. She was glad her faith had held. She recognised the tenderness in his voice; she put her hand in his, presently, and he kept it.

"Quite happy, little woman?" he asked, as they turned the Embankment.

He was not happy, he could not rid himself of the feeling of responsibility. Also, in the background of his consciousness, there was his compunction for his conduct to Lilian, his belief that, if she were completely lonely and unhappy, he would be unable to keep away from her. He knew the way his spirit moved him. His wife stood apart from all other women, unique and wonderful; he could never hurt her, yet he put that sudden question to her.

"Quite, quite happy," she answered. "More than happy, about myself, ourselves; but not about Kenny du Gore. He is so young, so hopeless, and I think he is longing for his wife. Are you sure her father is right in thinking it would harm her to see him?"

"I don't know; I should think it very likely."

"But you don't know for sure?" she persisted.

"I haven't seen her, if that is what you mean." He smiled again into her eyes, and her colour rose.

"I did not mean that. I know you will always do what you think right."

"I shouldn't interfere if I were you. Manny is really devoted to his daughter. He neglects his business, he is up there with her nearly all the time, he must know what is in her mind. But, here we are. Good-bye, dear. Thank you for coming for me. Don't worry about the du Gores." There was meaning in his words. "There is nothing for you to worry about. Kenny's case is hopeless. I've looked at it from all sides; there isn't a chance for him. Good-bye."

But Berenice thought differently. She could not leave it at that.

CHAPTER XXII

It was not without difficulty Berenice gained access to Lilian, for, Lilian was denied to all visitors. But she smiled her way into Jane's confidence, and Jane herself thought the "Missus sat too much by herself."

"She won't see a soul but her father. And, when he comes, he talks of nothing but the young master. She wants rousing, I think, and so does Cook. It's as much as my place is worth to announce you, but I'll show you the way to her bedroom, and you can please yourself about knocking and going in. She's just lying on the sofa, same as usual, doing nothing. I fetched away the tea-things ten minutes ago, and that was what she was doing of."

Berenice said she was quite prepared to risk being unannounced. She went upstairs, her soft draperies making no sound.

She knocked, then knocked again; at length a tired voice said, "Come in."

She paused on the threshold, Lilian turned bewildered eyes on her. It was only for a moment she paused; but this Lilian was so different from what she had pictured. Illness had robbed the girl of her beauty, there was no grace or charm in the crumpled dressing-gown and dishevelled hair, she had a shawl about her, she was just a huddled figure on the sofa. The eyes she turned on her visitor were black-circled and sunken, all their bright-

ness quenched with weeping, the sad eyes of a young childless mother. That was all Berenice saw through her sudden mist of tears, and, because that was what she saw, Berenice's heart went out to her.

"I couldn't help coming," she said simply. "Forgive my coming—intruding."

"But who—who?" stammered Lilian; she made an effort to rise to her feet.

"Don't get up." Berenice went over to her swiftly, and knelt down beside her impulsively.

"Dear, poor dear! I wanted to come to you before. I saw your boy, you know, your father let me see him."

"*You!* It was you that put the flowers about him?"

"For you."

The barriers were soon down between them after that; they seemed to hear the sound of a child's voice and little pattering feet in the empty, silent house.

"I put the flowers for you, dear, since you were so ill." Then Lilian's sob broke out; they wept together.

"Tell me how he looked," she asked presently. "Father cries so when I ask him."

"He looked his mother's darling, there was a smile on his face, so beautiful and peaceful!"

"Oh! they might have let me see him, they might have roused me to see him," she sobbed.

"I knew he was with God, no one who saw his smile could doubt it. I want to help you to bear your loss, they wouldn't let me come before; but I had to come now."

"I'm glad you came."

So this was the lawyer's wife! Resplendent and beautiful Berenice looked in her sables and velvet, the fashionable hat sitting well on the red-gold of her hair;

but more beautiful than her raiment was the soft light in her eyes, the light of an exquisite sympathy.

"I am so glad you came," Lilian said again, scarcely knowing what spirit moved her to the words.

"I am glad you are glad."

What a bewilderment of feelings assailed Lilian, since this was the lawyer's wife. Everything she had thought about him, or about any feeling he might have had for her, suddenly assumed a different aspect, suddenly became absurd. She, in rivalry with this beautiful, beautiful woman! She tried to tell her something of what she was feeling; she began to tell her. She was incoherent and faltering, but Berenice, blushing a little, knew quite well what was in her mind. She knew quite well that people considered her beautiful, and she was always glad Errington should have that cause to be proud of her.

But she could not let Lilian go on trying to express herself on such an irrelevant subject. She had a message for her. She saw it was going to be made easy for her, she had come thinking it might be so difficult; but now it would not be difficult, only she must take her time, leading up to it, not giving it abruptly.

They talked; soon Lilian ceased to think of Errington, or of herself, soon she felt that from the woman who had had no child she was drawing her first comfort, the first assuagement of her grief. It was borne in upon her that, at least, she could be glad she had known the thrill and passion of maternity, had held her baby in her arms, and given it suck; her life had not been unfulfilled, she had her memories. She grew a little comforted, talking of baby ways and prattlings.

It was then, when Berenice saw her all softened with

sweet memories, that she asked, quite gently, her hand laid upon the other's arm, hesitatingly, as if she asked a favour:

"And your husband, your poor husband, Everard's father? What of him?"

Then the flush and shame of it burnt Lilian suddenly. She took off the gentle hand, turning away abruptly.

"Don't be angry with me for asking, dear. Surely you are not angry?" Berenice pleaded.

The shame was overwhelming, it flooded speech. This was the lawyer's wife, and she had thought, she had dreamed—self-abasement shook her. What of her husband? What of Kenny? She had so dreaded to ask, she had been so hurt, so bitterly hurt, at his staying away from her, and so frightened. She had tried to be a good wife to him, all the other time she had tried to be a good wife to him. The rest was a nightmare, a dream left from her illness. Her lips, her arms, her thought, had been for Kenny only, surely, surely he had not doubted her!

Berenice misread her silence momentarily, for it fitted in with Manny's action.

"You don't really doubt it was an accident?" she said in a low voice, shocked. "Oh! Lilian, how could you!"

"No! no! it wasn't that," Lilian said, "it wasn't that."

Now she turned and caught the other.

"Oh! I must tell you. I hate to tell you. Kenny has stayed away from me, not me from him. I don't know why I'm frightened, it was because—because—oh, don't be shocked, it isn't true. But I'm afraid he stays away because he thinks—because some one has told him

—your husband was—too good to me!” It was cruel to look upon the scarlet painful flush of her shame.

The great heart of Berenice gave a throb as she averted her eyes. She did not disengage her dress or her hand.

“Poor Lilian, poor, poor Lilian!” she said. “How unhappy you must have been!”

“You—you know it isn’t true. How could he have looked at me—and you—you so beautiful?”

Berenice stooped to put her arms about her, and kissed her.

“It was not because I’m beautiful,” she said, “it was because you and he are both too fine.” Lilian lay quiet after that, crying more softly. Berenice tried to follow her thoughts.

“Talk to me,” she said again, gently, “try to tell me. I know you you are both so good.”

Lilian turned her desperate eyes to her.

“I’m not good. I said it was easy to be good, but it isn’t. It was he—that was good.”

Berenice kissed her again.

Lilian thought she was telling the truth. She thought now, now that she was seeing the lawyer’s wife, and realising her, that she had been right all along, it had been only friendship he had offered her.

“It was he that was too good,” she repeated.

“I couldn’t doubt him, dear, I never doubted him”; yet her heart leaped; “and Kenny could not doubt you.”

Then there was another pause.

“You know why he stays away from you?”

“He doesn’t care, he has never cared. Nobody cares for me now!” She burst out crying again.

"*I'm good again, muvver, and I love you,*" came sobbing to her out of the silence.

"Oh! I'm so sorry for you. Poor mother, poor lonely mother! But his father! his father is lonely too."

"Kenny, you have seen Kenny?" Her tears were arrested.

"I have just come from him."

"From Kenny?" - Her voice was full of surprise.

"I did not know you knew each other!"

"Nor did we." Berenice smiled. "But I wanted to see him; perhaps you can guess why."

Again the swift colour burnt in Lillian's cheek.

"And he, too, was glad, I think, in my coming. He gave me a message for you."

"A message? A message for me."

"Yes! He said 'tell her I don't believe, tell her I've never believed, that foolish story Elsa Beethoven is putting about. I know it's all lies, silly lies. I have never believed a word of it.'" Berenice repeated this quite quietly, although her colour had risen too, and her eyes were still averted.

"Why has he stayed away?" Lillian asked, breathlessly. "Then, why has he stayed away?"

"Your father told him that it would kill you to see him, that you could not forgive what he had done. He goes away to-morrow. That was the message he left you. He is utterly wretched, poor fellow, he feels himself a pariah! He talks to the boy sometimes, as if he were still with him. 'I didn't mean to hurt you, you know daddy didn't mean to hurt you,' he says over and over again."

Lilian had hardly dared acknowledge to herself all that Kenny's absence had meant to her. Yet, there had been moments in the dead of the night, strained and unacknowledged moments, when it had seemed that only her husband's head, laid low against her breast, could still the agony she felt because that little head, so like his own, had been wrenched from it forever.

"I don't understand. Where is he going? Why is he going? I've been so ill, I've heard nothing."

"He has so often asked if you would not even see him. 'I suppose she thinks I did it on purpose,' he said to Errie."

"Oh! how awful! how awful!"

"He wanted to know whether you would not see him before he went, whether you would not bid him good-bye."

"Go on!"

"Your father said you could not even bear the sound of his name; you would not even let him name Kenny to you."

"It—it was the way he spoke of him. I could not bear to hear him called a murderer. I knew he loved Everard."

How simple it was, how easy of explanation.

Lilian, lying spellbound, heard how her husband looked, and much that he had said, and of his terrible remorse, and that he, too, had been ill. She heard it was Manny who had kept him away, not Elsa's gossip; *that* he had put away as if it were not worth considering! It might have been difficult for Lilian to show Errington's wife what had been in her mind; but it was not difficult for Berenice to divine it. All of them had wished to tell her, insisted, as it seemed, on telling her,

that which she did not wish to know. Yet the pain of it was already assuaged. He had his larger appetites, his subtler needs, but it was she whom he loved, and had made his wife.

In elliptical, broken sentences Lilian showed what was in her mind; but Berenice cleared it of false shame.

"There is nothing between you and your husband but misunderstanding," she said, at the end of her visit. "Go to him, and tell him that he has not estranged you forever, that you never meant to let him go from England without a word of pity from you, or a God-speed, or promise for the future. Tell him you never meant that. Don't let all the generosity be on his side. He never doubted you."

Lilian kissed and clung to her.

"How good you have been to me, how good! I shall never forget it, never! I'm going to him, now, this very moment. Oh! how I thank you!"

CHAPTER XXIII

KENNY hated scenes. Lilian made up her mind she would not make a scene.

It was with infinite fatigue that, as soon as Berenice had left her, she dressed, and horrified her household by having a cab sent for.

"And not even a black dress on!" said the scandalised Jane, to the indignant nurse, as Lilian drove off to that address in Boundary Road which Berenice had given her.

She was shown up to Kenny's room without any difficulty. The only difficulty she had was in getting there! For, she had been very ill, and her legs were not half as strong as her head.

Kenny was sitting, almost as the Kennards had found him in the afternoon. He had not the energy to go out, fortunately, he had not even had the energy to ring for more whiskey. Lilian's entrance only partially roused him.

"Shut that damned door," were the first words she heard him say.

He thought it was the maid who had come in to take away the tray, to make up the fire, to "bother" him; but, when he saw who it was, his words were hardly more gracious.

"Oh! so you did come to see the last of me?" he said, without rising.

"Kenny, I'm so—seedy."

The stairs had been a little too much for her strength; the room went round her as she entered it. She turned very white, and faltered, she was nearer fainting than she had ever been in her life; her face frightened him.

"Kenny—I'm—I'm—dying."

She wasn't dying, she was merely a little faint from the stairs, and the close room, and the sight of Kenny. She would have fallen, but he had caught her too quickly.

"What the devil did you come out for?" was all he said. But, when she opened her eyes, she found herself sharing the sofa with him.

"Are you better?" he asked, in a minute or two. "You have no right to be out; who gave you leave to come out?"

"You wouldn't come to me," she whispered.

She was getting better; it had only been a momentary dizziness, and failure of strength. But now she put her face on his shoulder. "You wouldn't come to me."

"Oh! they told you that, did they?"

The poor wretch held her, but he had no grace to tell her that her coming meant salvation to him, hope.

"I've wanted you so, Kenny," she said, "so badly, all the time."

And she burst into tears.

"Wanted *me*?"

Fancy anybody wanting him!

"All the time. Why didn't you come?"

He was inarticulate, but she felt his arm tighten about her.

"Well! you've got me now," was all he said, "you can make the most of it. I'm off to-morrow; they've told you that, I suppose?"

"Not without me, Kenny. You won't leave me; I can't bear it, I haven't got anything else—don't leave me!"

To feel that some one wanted him, that he was some one's need, touched all that was touchable in him.

"You're a good sort, Lil" He kissed her hair; he was abrupt, half-ashamed. "I don't want to go alone. But I didn't want to be in your way. You'll be happier without me now. You couldn't see me without thinking of it."

"Oh! Kenny!"

"I suppose they told you how it happened?"

"Don't let us talk about it yet. How have you done without any one to comfort you? I've had father—you've had nobody."

He was as dumb as an animal, but, like an animal, too, he felt the warmth of her body, and perhaps of her heart through it. Courage and hope revived in him.

"You've been awfully ill, haven't you?"

"I should have been better if you'd been there. I longed for you all the same."

"Me!"

"He was yours too!" She burst out crying again. She had not meant to, she knew Kenny hated scenes; but he did not seem to mind this one.

"I say; don't do that," he said. And she hushed herself against his shoulder, where he let her rest.

"Let us begin again," she whispered.

Many months afterwards, Lilian, recovered in health and strength, full of new hopes, wrote to Berenice from Australia.

"I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for coming

to me that day, for sending me to Kenny. He was so unhappy. He is better now, but he hates to be alone. I never leave him, he is so good and kind to me, puts up with all my tempers and the things I do wrong. I know now that he really cares for me, that he did all along. I am going to have a baby; we can hardly talk of it yet, even to each other. But when it is with us, we are coming home. I am going to bring it to father, and then he will forgive me for having run away with Kenny again."

There was more in the letter. There had been a good many letters, all on the same lines. And Kenny had written too. He said Lil had always been a good sort, and they were all right together now. She had been greatly admired on board, and her hair had grown since she had been at sea, it was past her waist now!—Kennard would remember her hair. He was getting some very good racing, and was going to try to pick up a couple of two-year-olds. The Sphinx's legacy would help him to run a horse or two when he came back."

It was quite characteristic, both letters were characteristic.

Not a word had passed between Berenice and her husband about Elsa Beethoven's accusation, or Lilian's broken confession. She had asked him no questions, and so completed her conquest of him. Perhaps it was that he had in his mind, her beautiful confidence and delicate reticence, when he handed her back the letters, saying:

"Oh! you women, you dear, good women! It must have been through watching your power of love and forgiveness, each of you for her man, that the ideal was conceived of the love of God for all mankind. How

much too good you are for us! Berenice, it is you who taught me that!"

"Then I have taught you a creed in which I have no belief," she answered smiling, carrying him his coffee-cup. "I don't think many of us are good enough, or great enough, for the task we have been given, to love and serve. We grow our souls that way." And her grown soul shone through her beautiful eyes.

He drew her down to him, and held her.

"So, in your opinion," he interrogated her thoughtfully, "woman is the great compromise, standing between man and human justice?"

"Leavening law with love," she whispered.

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